CERRO GORDO

CERRO GORDO MINES

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Message:
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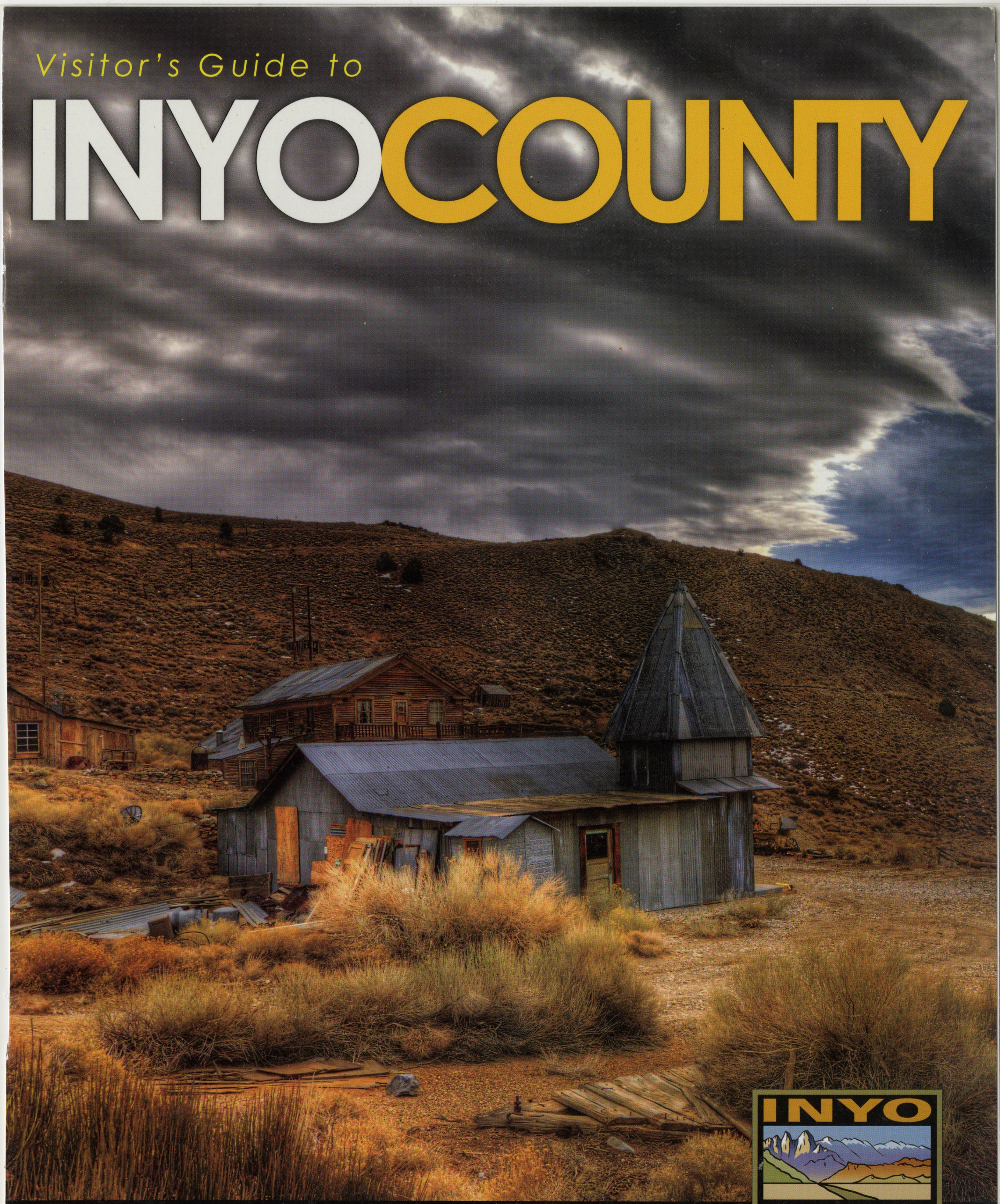
Visitor's Guide to

INYO COUNTY



FIFTH EDITION

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INYO COUNTY

The Other Side of California

DEATH VALLEY AND THE EASTERN SIERRA

CERRO GORDO MINE... THE GEM OF INYO COUNTY

By David Woodruff

Photos by Dennis & Kim Dessolier

Situated high near the summit of a peak in the southern Inyo Mountains at an elevation of 8500' stand a few humble and mostly rundown buildings. These are the modest remains of the glory that was once Cerro Gordo. Pablo Flores discovered this rich vein of silver, lead and zinc while prospecting this lofty land in 1865. It was named Cerro Gordo, meaning "fat hill" in reference to the rich ore deposits.

And rich deposits Cerro Gordo had indeed. The ore proved to be of extremely high quality. The mines were a great distance from any major town and transportation costs to move the ore was going to be very high. Several unique ideas were born to keep the cost of transportation down.

The silver ore was refined on location making for nearly pure silver being transported from the mountain. Production sometimes outpaced the ability to move it and it was claimed silver ingots would pile up so extensively that miners would build shelters of the precious bars. At the base of Cerro Gordo stood serene Owens Lake spreading 12 miles across the valley floor. Two steam boats were brought in to transport the

Cerro Gordo Mining Area

Cerro Gordo Mining Area

valuable silver across the placid lake.

Perhaps due to its remote location, real interest in the Cerro Gordon deposits didn't really take off until 1868 when Mortimer Belshaw, investor from Los Angles, arrived upon the scene, partnered with owners of some of the largest mines and built an extensive smelter on the shore of Owens Lake. Bullion production at Cerro Gordo exploded and helped bring prosperity to the growing town of Los Angeles.

Cerro Gordo grew to become the most productive silver mine in California. Several mines were developed and silver and lead mining boomed through the mid 1880s. Sporadic mining continued over the next seventy

Continued on page 4

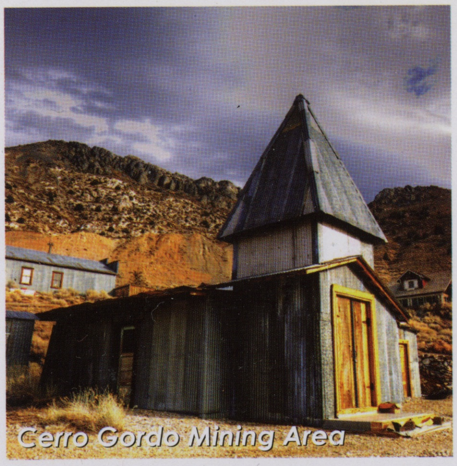
Cerro Gordo Mining Area

Cerro Gordo Mining Area

Continued from page 3

years, but never again reached its former glory. Zinc was mined up until 1957 when the mines closed for good.

But Cerro Gordo was not finished. Several buildings remained and a investors restored a few of them and operated a unique Bed & Breakfast for adventuresome tourists in this airy location during the 1980s and 90s. The B&B is currently closed but the graded dirt road is still open and passable to most vehicles. The road is overall in good shape, but its open exposure as it climbs the steep mountain is not for the faint of heart. The buildings are on private land so please be respectful of them when you make the trip.


Cerro Gordo Mining Area

Cerro Gordo Mining Area

Cerro Gordo Ghost Town

Michael Strassman

Dubbed "Fat Hill" and "Old Smokie", by our ancestors, the famous Cerro Gordo Ghost Town is now available by reservation only. You and your family and friends can enjoy a day of guided or self-guided tours of the famous old site, or register as an overnight guest in the 1868 Belshaw House (accommodates up to 5) or the "new" 1904 Cerro Gordo Bunkhouse (accommodates up to 12). For groups of 8 or more you can enjoy delicious meals served in the dining room of the 1871 American Hotel, the oldest hotel in California, east of the Sierra.
Learn about Cerro Gordo's contribution to history, as the "Comstock" to the City of Los Angeles and the Port of Los Angeles at San Pedro and view an assortment of artifacts from the colorful mining era of Inyo County's past.

Michael Strassman

The town site is perfect for photography clubs, photo workshops, movie and advertising venues. Unlike Bodie, Cerro Gordo is privately owned and arrangments can be made so you can devise your own shooting schedule according to the light and not the clock. Unlike Calico, Cerro Gordo remains essentially authentic, reflecting the boomtown era from 1867 to the present. The photo opportunities are too numerous to mention. Hike to see the truly magnificent views from peaks surrounding Cerro Gordo, including one-of-a-kind vistas of the Owens Dry Lake and Mt. Whitney to the west and the Racetrack at Panamint Valley, within Death Valley National Park, to the east.

Nestled in the Inyo Mountains, Cerro Gordo can be reached from State Highway 136. Turning east at Keeler, just 15 minutes south of Lone Pine.

Two-wheel drive vehicles regularly use Cerro Gordo Road, however four-wheel drive capability is recommended for the 7.5 mile trip up to the ghost town.

For further information, including rates and availability, call (760) 876-5030.

Cerro Gordo is closed to artifact and mineral collecting and mine exploration. For further information regarding our annual mineral collecting event, please contact the Lone Pine Gem and Mineral Society at (760) 876-4319

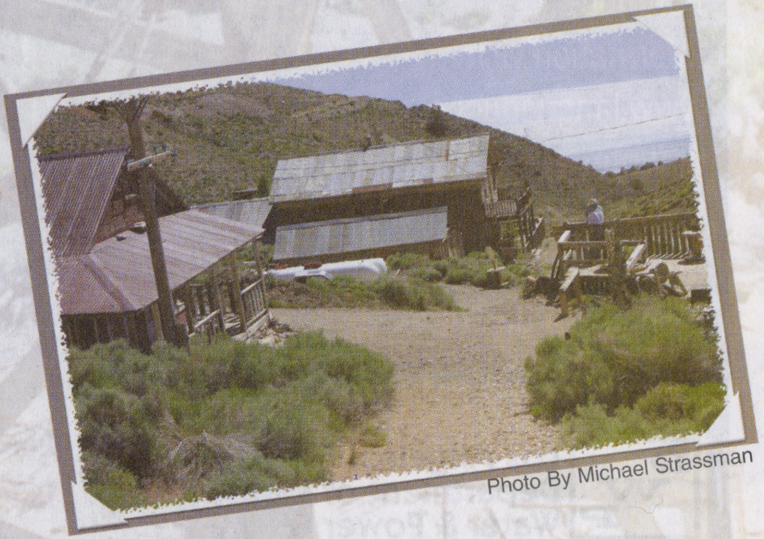


Photo By Michael Strassman

Article sponsored by Cerro Gordo

SUV Tour 1
Swansea Grade To Cerro Gordo
4WD MANDATORY

SUV Tours

Four-wheel drivers can take the road south all the way to George Creek (8 miles), named after a famous Indian Chief. A beautiful grove of old oak trees makes a nice spot to stop and have a snack. An adventurous descent is back down to Manzanar Historical Site, two roads can be found at five and seven miles from the Onion Valley Road. On one of these roads Ansel Adams took his famous shot of Mt. Williamson, while working at the internment camp. At Manzanar, you may encounter some blocked off roads and locked gates. Head north to a road that goes along the northern border of the historic site to access Hwy. 395.

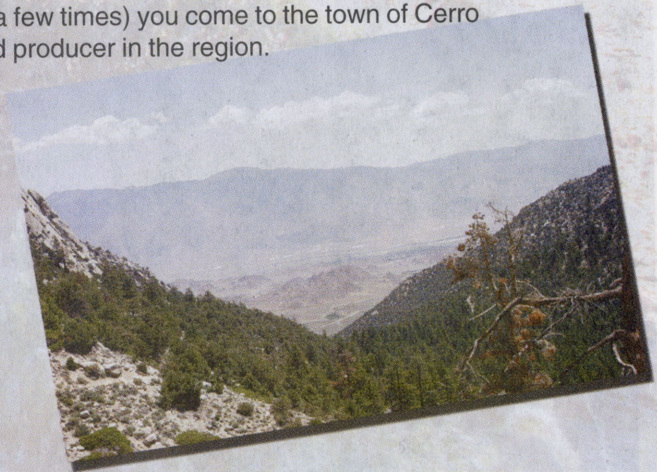
Swansea Grade to Cerro Gordo. This is an all day excursion through rough terrain and remote country. Walking back to civilization could take up to two days. Be Prepared.

South of Lone Pine on Hwy. 395, take Highway 136 to the site of the town of Swansea. In 1872, this would have been a busy place. There was a smelter melting down gold, a wharf leading into Owens Lake, and miners heading off to Cerro Gordo, or Panamint City near Death Valley. In March of that year the Lone Pine earthquake occurred and the western shore of Owens Lake dropped 8 feet. The wharf no longer reached the lake and a new dock and town sprung up at Keeler three miles south. Many structures remained until a devastating debris flow sped down the mountains and wiped out the majority of the buildings. When visiting here, please respect the privacy of the current owners of the site.

The road is easy to find but very quickly deteriorates into a cobble-strewn thoroughfare. If you think this is bad-turn around now. It gets worse. About three miles farther the grade enters a rocky gully. Definitely low four-wheel drive terrain. In another two miles, a stark valley is reached; interesting hiking in the canyon to the right. Continue up into the cool pines. After 11 miles you reach the crest of the range at 9,500 feet. Take the road to the left to visit the Burgess Mine, where a shaft and buildings still remain. Backtrack to the intersection and take the road heading south and a little east. It rises over several crests offering great views of the Saline Valley to the east and Owens Lake to the west.

Either side of the crest is wilderness; so old spur roads you may see on a map are closed and could be washed out. Continuing on your path under the Old Salt Tram that used to transport salt from Saline Valley to Keeler. The tram is an amazing feat of engineering, a perfectly straight line across chaotic terrain. Unfortunately, it has slowly deteriorated over the years. Pretty soon you'll come to a cabin. This is a Mexican Spring. The cabin is being restored. You are allowed to sleep there but please treat it with care. The road drops along the west face of a hill and many mines can be seen. Stay out! Stay Alive!

Twenty-one rough miles later (its been five hours if you stopped only a few times) you come to the town of Cerro Gordo. Rumor is this mine built Los Angeles and was the biggest gold producer in the region. Rare crystals and minerals have been found here, but the mines and tailings are off-limits to collectors. The town is privately owned by friendly Mike Patterson, (760-876-5030) It has a bed and breakfast and tours by reservation only. Drop-ins are discouraged, but Mike can be available if you are in need.



From here, head down the canyon past spectacular rock formations to Hwy. 136. Just south of the intersection is the old Keeler Pioneer Graveyard. Notice that some of the graves have been washed away. Who knows, you might see an old miner's thighbone sticking out of the ground!

ROUTE 1 CERRO GORDO

THE RICH SILVER MINES OF CERRO GORDO, HIGH IN THE INYO MOUNTAINS, TRANSFORMED THE PUEBLO OF LOS ANGELES INTO A BUSY CENTER OF COMMERCE. THIS CHALLENGING AND REWARDING ROUTE FOLLOWS THE PATH OF ORE AND SUPPLIES AS IT BRINGS YOU TO BREATHTAKING HEIGHTS, AND BY ADVANCE ARRANGEMENT YOU CAN TAKE A TOUR OR EVEN SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE MOUNTAINSIDE MINING TOWN.

What to expect: The road is graded but quite rough. In the last $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles it climbs in a series of steep switchbacks with dizzying drop-offs and nowhere to turn around. Take your time—don't overheat! Snow not cleared in winter. (Uphill vehicles have the right-of-way.)

Length: 21 miles.

Driving time: about 2 hours, one way.

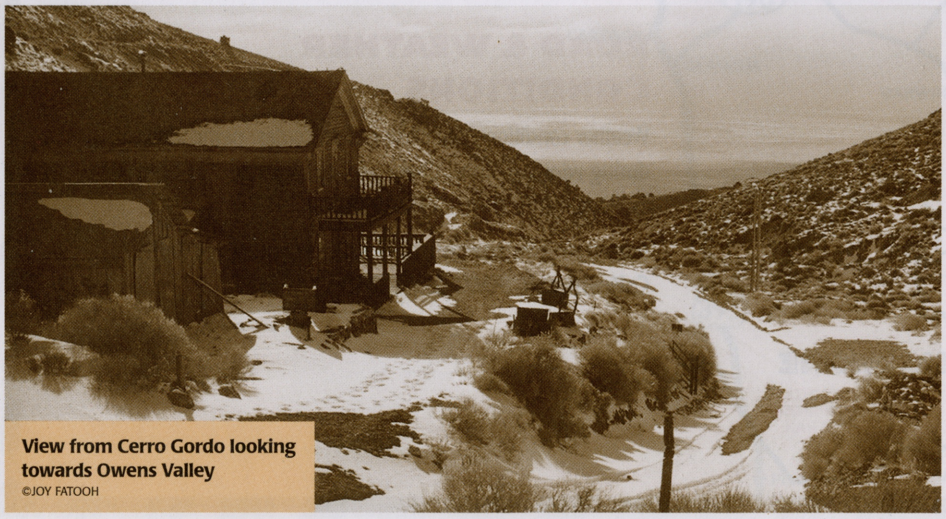
Getting there: From Lone Pine, starting at the traffic light in the center of town, go 1.8 miles south on U.S. 395 and turn left (east) onto State Highway 136 at the Interagency Visitor Center. The route begins here.

Along the route: Highway 136 leads toward the mountain range at the east side of the valley. In the 1860s, when local mining district superintendents asked native Paiute leader Chief George the mountains' name, he is said to have replied "Inyo"—meaning dwelling place of a great spirit.

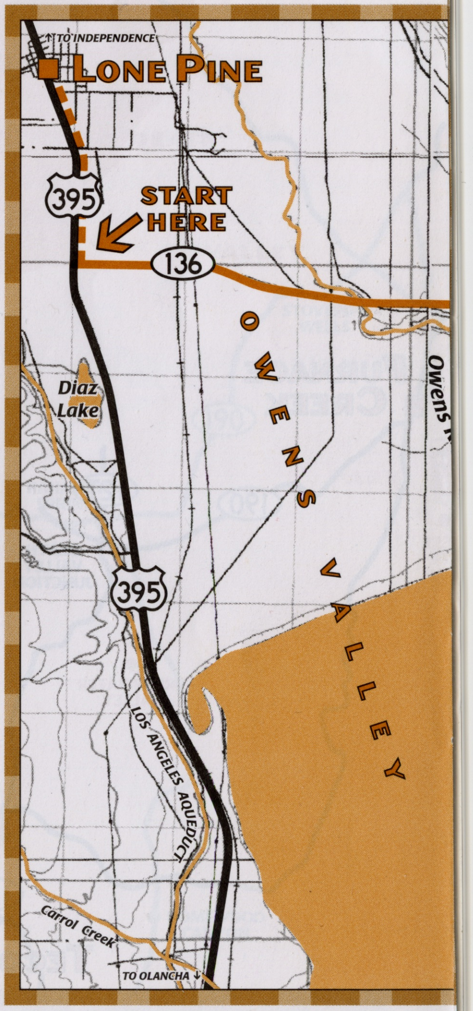
The river you'll cross was called Wakopi by the Paiutes, and it filled the lake they called Pacheta. Explorer John C. Fremont in 1845 named river, lake and valley for his friend and expedition member Richard Owens. At that time Owens Lake had a surface area of 110 square miles but was extremely shallow and saline. During the 1870s two steamers hauled silver bullion from smelters on the northeast shore to freight wagons waiting on the western shore, and on their return trip brought charcoal for the smelter fires.

Five miles along the route you can see, on the hillside, the white tailings of the Dolomite Mine. In the early 1890s local people called this site "Mountain of Marble" and sculptors and architects prized the pure white stone. A vein of equally high-quality black marble is just a few hundred yards away.

At 8.5 miles, as the road bends southward around the lake, look toward the foot of the mountains to see the concrete base of an historic salt tram that carried salt across the Inyos from Saline



View from Cerro Gordo looking towards Owens Valley
©JOY FATOOH



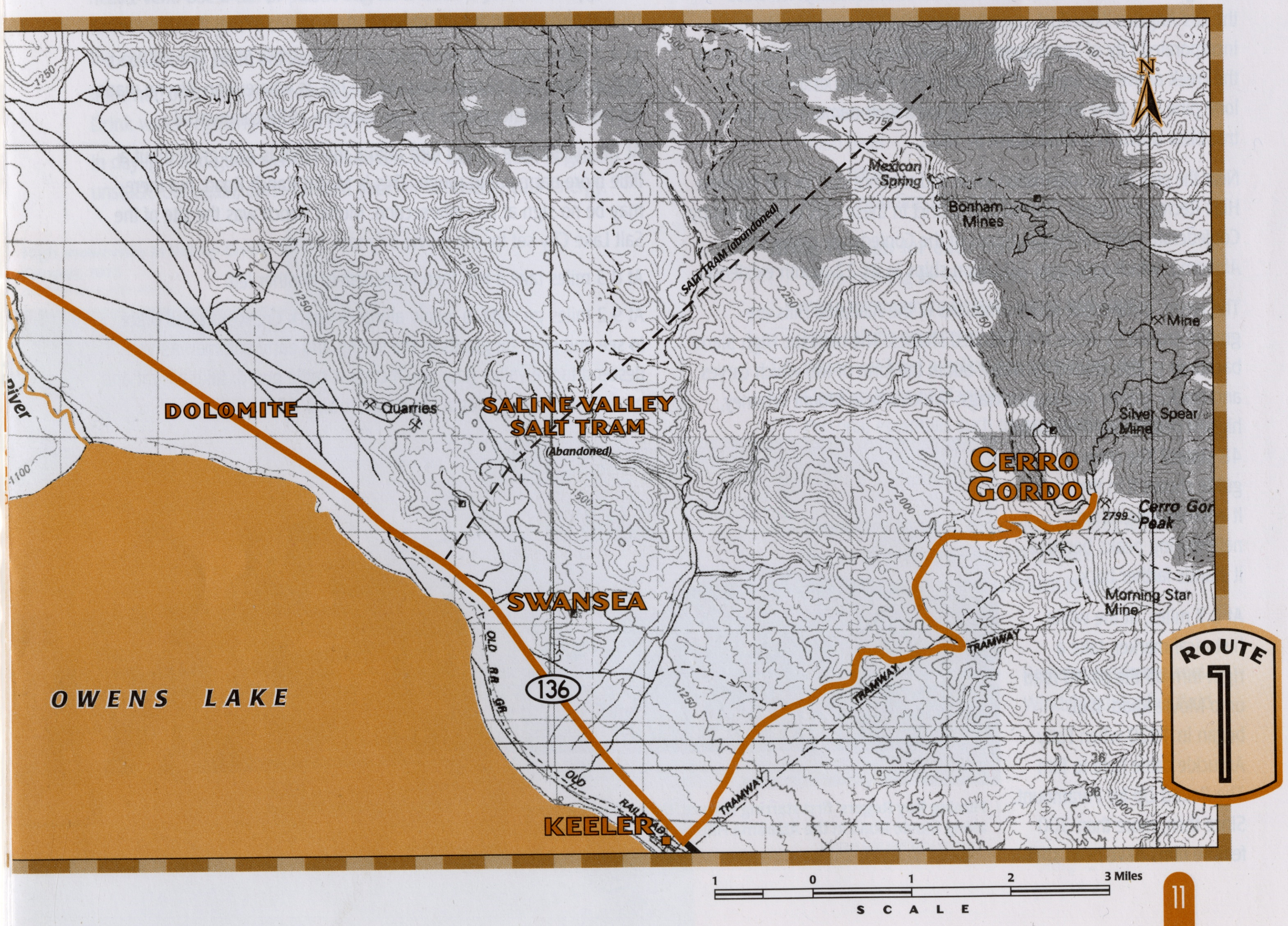
Valley on the other side. Up on the mountainside is one of the wooden tram towers.

The route encounters two small communities: Swansea, named for a Welsh coastal town, was the site of a furnace built in 1869 for processing Cerro Gordo ore. Keeler was named for a mine operator, responsible for laying out the town. Keeler was the southern terminus of the Carson & Colorado narrow-gauge railroad. The railroad never did link Carson City with the Colorado River as its named promised: by the time it reached Keeler in 1883, most of the local mines had played out.

Half a mile past Keeler, at 14.7 miles, turn left to read a historical plaque on a low rock, then head up the graded dirt Cerro Gordo Road. The road soon winds into the Inyo Mountains, up a rocky canyon where limestone laid down as ancient sea beds has been twisted and tilted by seismic forces. You'll pass the towers of an ore tram just as the road turns sharply north to begin its steep switchback climb to Cerro Gordo town site. As you climb, spiny, oddly-shaped Joshua trees begin to appear.

Cerro Gordo museum
©JOY FATOOH

In 1865 Pablo Flores struck paydirt at "Fat Hill" and by 1871 Cerro Gordo was a well established mining town. The silver boom ended in 1878 but zinc revived the mines from 1911 to 1915. By then Cerro Gordo had produced some $15 million worth of ore, more than any other source of silver, lead and zinc in California. Please respect private property, and for your personal safety don't explore Cerro Gordo on foot without arranging a tour with the owner. Call 760-876-1860. Hours 9 A.M. to 3 P.M., closed Wednesdays.



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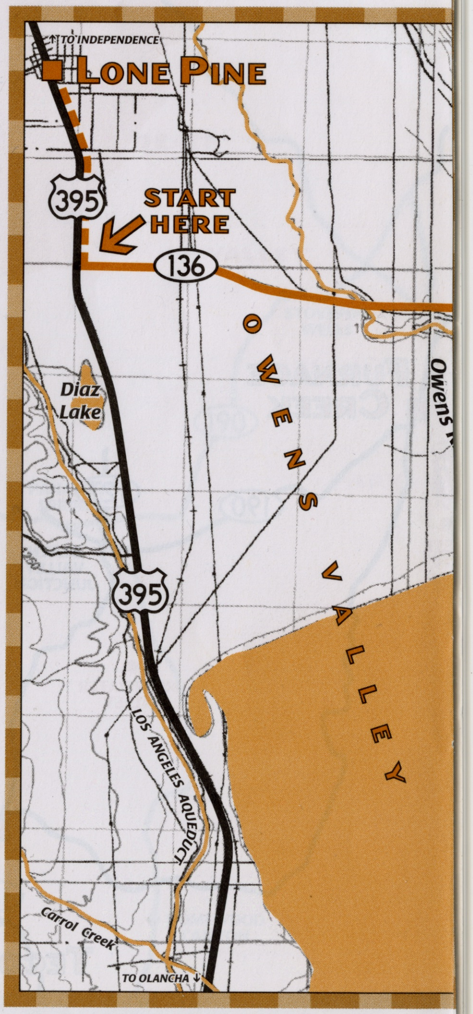

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©JOY FATOOH

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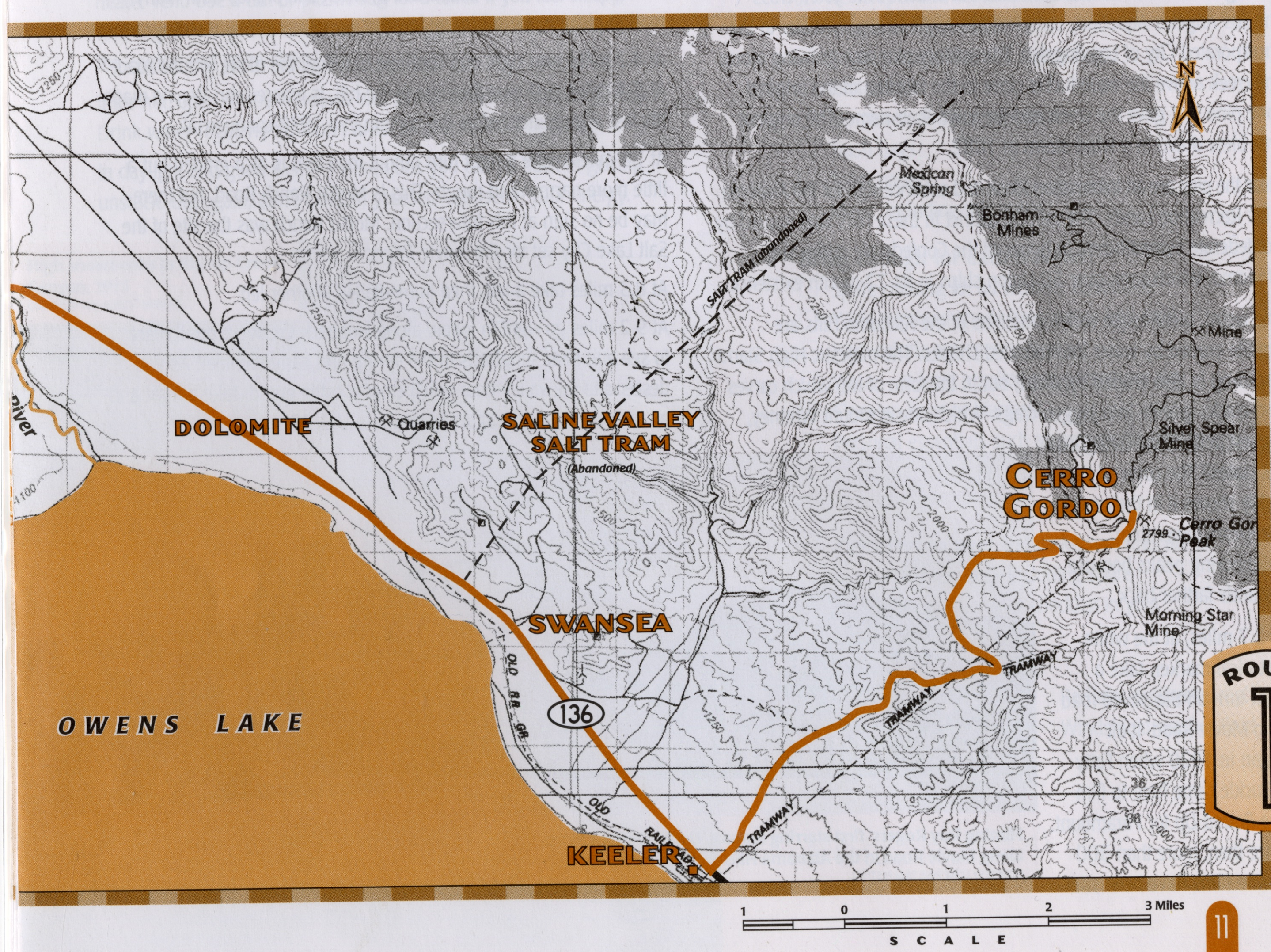


ROUTE 1

Cerro Gordo today as seen from the air. Hotel is at right center.

The town that built Los Angeles

CERRO GORDO

"Historic Legends of Inyo County" 1976

At an elevation of 9,217 feet in the Inyo Range of the Sierra Nevadas of California spreads out a small shelf on the side of Cerro Gordo Mt. On this little shelf, overlooking Owens Lake, the town of "Fat Hill" Cerro Gordo came into being.

Today Cerro Gordo is a ghost town located at the end of a road that offers a real challenge to a modern car. In fact even a horse finds it rough going and the people who know their mountains will recommend a good mule for the trip.

The view from the shelf edge looks down upon Owens Lake and its valley gives one a feeling of emptyness. Three things are missing from the landscape. No longer do the three foot gauge rails of the Carson & Colorado Railroad crawl across the desert flatland to end in Keeler as they once did. Known to railroad buffs as the Slim Princess this railroad from Mound House, Nevada reached Keeler, California, Aug. 1, 1883. Upon completion it's owner Darius Mills came out from New York to see his railroad for the first time. Behind a puffing little engine his narrow guage coach trundled for two long, dreary dusty days until end of track was reached at the base of Fat Hill.

When asked, "Well Sir, What do you think of the road?" Banker Darius Mills of New York City fixed the questioner with a gun barrel look and uttered one of the classic statements of railroad lore. "Sir, we either built it 300 miles too long or 300 years too soon."

The last section of trackage of this little line was abandoned April 30, 1960. The Slim Princess is now just a memory.

Another view of Cerro Gordo.

The lake bed of Owens Lake is still there but the shimmering water and its little steamers plying back and forth are gone. Only a dry salt incrusted swamp remains. The waters are taken away to quench the thirst of Los Angeles.

The once pround towers of the cable tramway no longer march from the lake's edge across the desert to climb up the mountain side for six miles to the mines on the shelf on the side of Fat Hill.

However these things were not there in 1865 when Pablo Flores, Juan Ochon and another miner found a mineralized out-cropping and built a veso to smelt their first ore samples. The vesos were crude rock furnaces at best, but in the 60's prospecting was also crude.

Pablo watched the blue-gray ore being smelted. This time it had to be pay day. It had not been an easy climb up from the lake. At 9,000 feet the air around Cerro Gordo was cool. Unless Pablo made his strike soon there would be no gay nights during the Summer in Los Angeles far to the south, when it was too hot to prospect the desert mountains.

At last the first run from the veso began to flow. It oozed out and filled the hole dug to receive it. The three men waited. The gob of ore cooled. Then by crude means it was determined that the ore of Fat Hill was rich. It would run nearly four hundred dollars a ton.

Before anything else could be done the ritual of discovery had to be performed. Each man swore, with the Virgin as his witness, that the secret of Fat Hill would be their own. No word would pass their lips.

Like all promised vows to eternal silence the vow to all that is holy was violated and before Pablo and his friends could realize the fullness of their treasures in the pleasure palaces of Los Angeles the secret leaked out. As in so many cases the answer could be stated simply. "But I only told my cousin."

By the end of 1866 the population of Cerro Gordo reached 700 people. The rush for silver was on. From wherever rainbow chasers come they came to answer the call to riches.

At Owens Lake the miners paused to clean up, wash and cool off beside the quiet waters after days of travel across the desert. The climb to the top of the hill did not end in a miners paradise. At that elevation a harsh cold life awaited. Blizzards and extreme cold spells were all too common in the Winter.

Building costs were high. Freight rates boomed and a steady stream of wagons powered by 10 to 16 mules bumped and creaked across the desert brush lands following the never ending ruts. These ruts left Los Angeles 200 miles and 18 days away by way of 6th Street to the San

Fernando Valley. The first real climb came at Cahuenga Pass. Going out this road was rough, but coming in to Los Angeles it was sheer misery. At Cahuenga the west bound wagons had to be doubled over the pass. The lead wagon was cut off from the trailer and dragged to the top and blocked. The team was taken back and the second wagon brought up. The two wagons were hooked up and braked down the other side of the hill. From the foot of Cahuenga the ruts wound through the Soledad Hills to Red Rock Canyon with its weirdly flaming walls. From the rocks the ruts headed out across the Mojave Desert until the shadow of the towering Sierras was reached and then they turned north following along a route very close to the present Highway 6 to Owens Lake.

The first bullion shipment from Cerro Gordo arrived in Los Angeles in 1868. The rich load of bullion did not stay in Los Angeles, but it did generate a lot of excitement as it was unloaded. The treasure was destined for San Francisco where it would be smelted and refined. The silver would be separated from the lead and sent to the U.S. Mint.

From Los Angeles the rich shipment was sent by train to Wilmington over the rails of the Los Angeles and San Pedro R.R. This little railroad was no great shakes as a transportation system and its little engine the "Gabriel" had to work at its job of moving cars along the bumpy roadbed. Stages made the trip to the harbor 31 minutes quicker, but the train was cheaper. At the end of the track the shipment was unloaded again and loaded onto lighters and taken out to be reloaded on ships of the coastal trade. In time it did reach the mint, and in time it did become coinage.

Before bullion trains could leave the Fat Hill the ore had to be mined. Claims were staked out all over the hillside. Some claims were worked for ore and some were worked for quick profits. More worked the market than worked for ore. Over 75 claims were patented in and about the little bench on the side of the hill.

One of the "better" parts of the road to Cerro Gordo.

What happened to Pablo Flores? History does not say but it is hoped that he did have his gay days in Los Angeles.

In the first wave of adventurers to the hill came a man by the name of Mortimer W. Belshaw. Though a wanderer of gold and silver camps Mr. Belshaw was not destined to labor with a pick and shovel. New York was his home, but gold and silver were his dream. His shrewd eyes quickly recognized where the treasure was located. While others dug for ore and pushed shafts into the mountain walls Mr. Belshaw bought up all the galena deposits he could locate. As a mining engineer he knew the lead content was vital in the silver smelting process.

The trail from Keeler to the shelf on the side of the hill was a real beast killer. For the shack lined street on the edge of the lake the road headed straight across the desert and then up. On the way up it was a steep twisting tortuous climb.

Belshaw saw this trail road as a situation that needed his engineering skill. With the aid of the other mine owners he surveyed and built a road through the wagon-narrow valleys and along the ledges that hemmed in the canyons. In a very short time the Belshaw Toll Road was open for service. On the first day that the road was ready for traffic the other miners found out just how shrewd the builder was. Because when he said, "Toll Road," he meant Toll Road. From the first day he charged toll on every wagon that used his road. This included the wagons of those who helped him build it.

With the road in operation Belshaw went to work on the hill. A pipe line brought in water from the only adequate springs. A smelter was built on his Union Mine property. Bullion bars shaped like loaves of bread weighing from 90 to 110 lbs. Each were shipped out by the wagon load. The charcoal smelters were reducing four tons of bullion a day. Bullion that came from ore assaying as high as $750 a ton. By adding a water jacket to the smelter the production jumped to ten tons a day. By 1868 he was producing silver-lead bullion at a rate that was faster than it had ever been produced in the U.S. before.

All that remains of the tramway down the mountain.

To speed up production a second smelter was built at Swansee, about two miles north of Keeler. These two smelters reduced 500 tons of ore a month.

One of the worst sections of road on the entire trip to Los Angeles was the stretch of sand around the south end of Owens Lake. Here the sand had been churned to a powder that was hub deep. To solve this team killing horror two steamers were built to haul the bullion across the wide lake.

The "Bessie Brady" and "Mollie Stevens" were soon hauling bullion bars across the lake faster than the freighters could take them away. At one time 30,000 ingots were stacked along the beach at Cartago. The guards used the bullion as bricks to build crude cabins for protection against the weather. The little steamers were delivering bullion at the rate of 15 tons a day.

Even though the smelters were turning out treasure at an unheard of rate the days of success for Belshaw on Fat Hill were numbered. A three act play that would tell of the death of Cerro Gordo as a fortune producer was about to begin.

Act One would find a rival group who would harass the original developer with suits. Act Two would feature the slow death scene as the ore body began to play out. Act Three would feature the horrors of the villian "Fire" who would sweep through the camp. The final curtain would close on Mortimer W. Belshaw's Cerro Gordo adventure in Oct. 1879 as a mule team carried the last load of bullion down from Fat Hill.

Left behind were legends and tragedy. Legends say that both ships that plied the lake lost a load of silver bars that was supposed to have slipped its lashings on the "Bessie Brady" and to have splashed overboard never to be recovered. At midlake the "Mollie Stevens" was reported to have casually capsized and scattered its tons of treasure across the lake bottom. Those are nice stories and they help to make it seem worth while to search the old lake bed. If the stories are true then these electronic gadgets are not as good as some people say that they are.

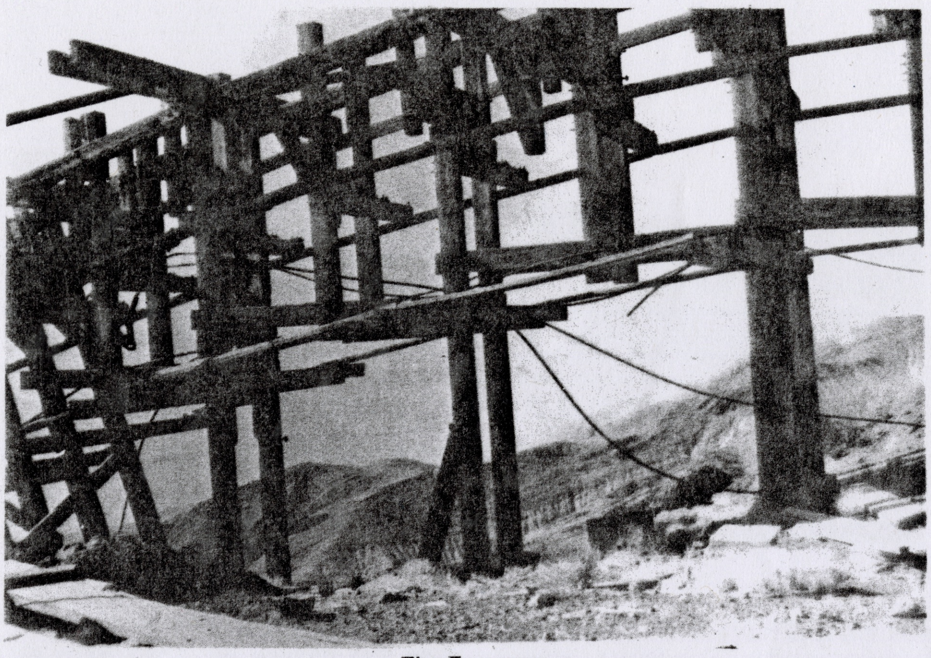
China Stope bears witness to the tragic life in the mines. Mining at the 200 foot level 29 celestials toiled. Either by ignorance or by skimpiness on the company's part they neglected to timber where they should have. No one came out after the cave-in. The dust settled, the roar quieted, and the unnumbered stope at the 200 foot level became known as "China Stope". The other shafts went deeper and deeper in search of ore.

By 1881 Cerro Gordo was a ghost camp. State Geologist W.A. Goodyear visited the camp in 1888 and made a thorough study of the area. After exploring the labrinth of tunnels and testing his samples thoroughly he wrote in his report. "It is strange that this mine, the richest in Inyo County, should be deserted." Stranger still was the fact that this statement printed in a public document was read by many and was ignored by all.

Thirty years after Belshaw departed from "Fat Hill" and left his Union Mining Co. a pile of burned out rubble Mr. Louis D. Gordon began exploring the area. During the year 1911 Gordon began a very thorough survey of the mines. Silver and galena he found in reasonable amounts, but he also found something else--zinc. Zinc had always been present, but the miners in the early boom days were silver and gold hunters. Zinc was just an unnecessary by-product to them. By 1900 zinc was becoming an industrial metal to be reckoned with and Gordon saw in it a fortune.

The year 1914 saw Cerro Gordo booming again. It was not the booming of yesteryear that included brawling, shooting and hell raising. It was the booming of a well organized mining venture. Mr. Louis D. Gordon was not a man to be fooled with. When he took over a project a man worked and earned his pay. Gordon also spent money on his operations. Electric power poles paraded across the desert floor and up and over the hills.

At a cost of $250,000 a six mile long tramway extended up from Keeler.



The Tramway.

will fill place until new cook arrives."

However by the end of 1917 the job was too much for one organization to handle and the Big Four Employment Agency, Hummell Brothers Pacific Audit 7 System Co. were called on to fill orders for laborers.

When there was not a shortage of men to plague Gordon there was the ever present railroad car shortage. Ore out of the mines had quite an adventuresome trip.Down the mountain side went the ore buckets which dumpedd into the narrow gauge cars of the Carson & Colorado R.R., and hauled off to Owenyo. At Owenyo the narrow gauge cars dumped their loads into standard gauge cars of the Southern Pacific R.R., and from there it traveled to its final destination.

A telegram from T.F. Rowlands to L.D. Gordon dated 10-3-17 sums up the situation.

Ogden, Utah 10-3-17
L.D. Gordon
Keeler, Calif.

Now that we are well supplied with men Mina and Owenyo to transfer cars promptly, I feel confident can keep you supplied with cars Keeler, with some regularity. On the other hand you understand how very hard pressed railroads are at this time for equipment as well as help. Under circumstaces cannot possibly promise always have cars you require but will do very best I can by you.

T.F. Rowlands

On Dec. 23, 1916 the Christmas spirit was settling over Cerro Gordo. Men were preparing to get out. Early in the afternoon snow began to fall. By noon Christmas Day the heaviest snow fall in years settled over the hill. A high wind whipped through the canyons and over the ridges. The power lines were soon on the ground. Snow drifted over the tram towers in places and the camp was out of coal.

A message from Keeler tells the story.

Keeler, Calif. Noon Dec. 25, 1916
James C Cline
1430 West 49 St. Los Angeles

Heaviest snow-fall in years accompanied by high wind. Power off and telephone lines on ground in several places. Out of coal at mine. Car coal arrives Keeler yesterday. Will get supply to mine as soon as can run tram. Wind still blowing fiercely with heavy snow still falling. This telegram to Keeler by special messenger -- will do everything possible to get things in running order again. Merry Xmas.

H.G. Rose

There was coal at Keeler but until the tram was working the coal would stay there and Cerro Gordo would be a cold place to spend Christmas.

As the snow and wind quieted down H.G. Rose made a survey of the facilities. He found nine of the steel towers that carried the power lines blown over. He put men to work getting the phone lines into operation and put in a call for six good miners and six muckers. By Thursday his crew had the lines in and the tram moving supplies up the hill again.

To show that things were booming at the mine J.R. Davis made the following report on ore conditions. "Six inches of ore at the 150 foot level assayed $288, twenty inches $3,000. Hillman reports today that vein has widened out and was richer than when I was there Saturday. Looks like important find."

Twenty railroad cars a day were being loaded and the empty ore buckets took back supplies. But it was not all smooth going. That trouble was beginning is evidenced in the following message from L.D. Gordon in San Francisco to J.C. Climo in Keeler.

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San Francisco 25-16
J.C. Climo Keeler, Calif.
Send at once responsible party to Springs at Pumping Station with instructions to remain there continuous and to hold possession of Springs against any and all trespassers and to use any means necessary to do this. Party should be furnished with provisions and bed and should remain at Springs until you receive further notice from me.
L.D. Gordon

Mr. Louis D. Gordon may have been an eastern city man, but he knew the way to protect his property and rights in the truly western manner. Water in a desert mining camp is a commodity that ranks next to gold. A spring is a thing to be held at all costs. The "Fat Hillers" arrived and took possession and promptly discouraged any and all trespassers. But this was the year 1917 and things had changed greatly since 1866-80 era when Belshaw took what he wanted and kept it. The enemy now did not play the game according to the rules of "Mr. Colt and Winchester."

A woman by the name of Simons was the enemy. She did not answer the call of the west by hiring a crew of gun slicks to go down and secure her share of the sparkling H2o. Instead she was very lady-like and secured a simple court order. A court order that said in substance, "You Sir, turn over 50 gallons of water per day to this poor woman and make it snappy."

That the court order was disquieting to Mr. Gordon is evidenced in his telegram to J.C. Climo on March 9, 1917.

Restraining order is as Marmby states. Furnish specified amount of water tomorrow and Sunday and wire me fully exact condition Saturday night and injury done to us by furnishing specified amount of water. Use Bedford McNeil Code.
L.D. Gordon

Now Mr. J.C. Climo was not a man to be pushed around. He had possession of the spring, and he gave the specified 50 gallons each day. However he kept his men at the spring and not one drop over 50 gallons was drained off.

Looking down towards Owens Valley.

Gordon also knew the temper of Climo and sent him a brief note that said, "I know how you feel but furnish water in accordance with court order or we will be in contempt of court. I am getting very busy and luck will change soon."

Eventually the order was cut to thirty gallons and later Gordon got full control of the spring and its water, but another battle was brewing. The stock market was causing anxiety. The big squeeze was on. The Cerro Gordo zinc boom was being felt in the east. Big money men studied the reports and they liked what they read.

Cerro Gordo itself was a going concern. The population was nowhere near the 3,000 mark of 1871, but it was livable town. An ice plant with a ten ton capacity was installed. Good houses were built, and conditions were better than good for the men. An electric hoist was installed and safety precaustions were enforced.

With the close of the First World War Gordon was being pressed by outside interests who wanted to gain control of the operations on Fat Hill. Some indication of his trouble is revealed in a telegram sent July 1.

Tonopah, Nev. July 1, 1919
J.C. Climo
Keeler, Cal.
Tried to get you on phone last evening and this morning. Suppose you have heard of the bunch we were handed. However, we fully believe that is not in the cards for that kind of stuff to eventually win. Have Lidell Survey Blue Jay and adjoining claims, Mountain Crag, Pagan, Ragged Edge, Safe Guard, Safety First and Newsboy Groups. Will write regarding.
L.D. Gordon

Gordon was out to increase production and get money to fight with. It is possible that he overextended himself and could not raise enough money to fight because the American Smelting & Refining Company became the owners of Cerro Gordo.

The new owners went at "Fat Hill" with vengeance. It was as though they wanted to get all the ore out and away before they too were frozen out by some one else. In 1929 the new company reported the following yield from

A view from the summit.

the mines. 3,000,000 pounds of lead, 290,420 ounces of silver, 786 ounces of gold, along with an unspecified quantity of zinc, and a bit of tungsten.

The east was once more to determine the fate of Cerro Gordo. By the mid-thirties the Big Depression was on. Money was scarce and the price of minerals tumbled. Gold held firm, but silver, zinc and lead were far from profit earners.

For the second time in 67 years Cerro Gordo was a ghost town. Weeds grew in the streets, houses sagged, and power lines fell. The tram was dead. Its empty buckets were stilled in their march across the sky. They screamed squealing defiance to the world with each gust of wind.

A Mojave mining man in 1939 tried to revive the town and mine but his efforts only stirred the dust in the streets for a brief spell.

Then during World War II Cerro Gordo came to life again. The boom began when the Silver Spear Mining Co. took over. Miners were in the town again. The ore cars were moving on the upper tailings pile. Deep in Fat Hill the sound of powder exploding on the 900 foot level could be heard. The tram was not running but Belshaw's road was rewarded and big trucks were hauling out the ore.

Over in Lone Pine Fred Fisher who was the last foreman to boss the mine crews had this to say. "Personally I think Cerro Gordo will make a comeback, just as she always does. Matter of fact, I don't think the main ore body has been found. It lies along a fault. In spite of all they've taken out, I don't think they've hit the jack-pot yet."

Out of Cerro Gordo $20,000,000 worth of silver, lead and zinc flowed to industry. This twenty million dollars worth of wealth left behind 27 miles of tunnels and levels that go down to 900 feet. Truly it was a Fat Hill.

It was not zinc or lead this time but tungsten.

Cerro Gordo's third and most modest boom era began and ended the same year. Once more the hill was dead, but no desert man would admit it.

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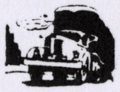
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OWNER OF MINING TOWN SAW VALUE OF ENTERING POLITICAL LIFE

Mortimer W. Belshaw was a mining engineer highly skilled in his profession and possessed of a fine set of mutton-chop whiskers, a handsome countenance, engaging personality and sharp wits.

Audacious as well as shrewd, it was seldom that a dollar on which his acquisitive gaze had been fastened ever eluded him.

In 1867, he journeyed to Cerro Gordo, a struggling silver camp far up in the Inyo Mountains above Owens Valley. Remote and accessible only by tortuous and treacherous trail, it had known desultory mining since 1865. There was plenty of rich ore, but the extreme difficulty of transporting it to a mill blocked Cerro Gordo's development.

Until, that is, the arrival of Mort Belshaw.

He took a look around, saw promise in the Union Mine and bought it.

He hired a small army of men, furnished them with shovels and picks, and before long the frightening trail had become a narrow, rocky but usable road, over which Belshaw with great effort hauled in machinery for a smelter.

Choosing a strategic location where there was no way of bypassing it, Belshaw erected a toll-gate, and money began to flow in from patrons of his road even before the treasure of the Union was tapped.

Belshaw laid claim to the only worthwhile spring in the vicinity, piped the water into camp and soon was realizing a tidy profit from that. Cerro Gordo boomed and Belshaw acquired its two busiest saloons, a mercantile establishment, a hotel and a livery stable.

His smelter began to turn out bars of silver bullion, and Belshaw contracted with a mule-team freighter to haul them 240 miles to San Pedro, the nearest point from which they could be shipped to the mint in San Francisco.

Cerro Gordo, which can be translated into "Fat Hill," was a ribald, misbehaved town from the start, the haunt of outlaws, crooked gamblers and swindlers, theives and thugs, and never in its short life was it thoroughly tamed.

It also was the habitat of many men of much wealth, and the richest of them all was Mort Belshaw.

But though his Union Mine earned millions for him, and his saloons, hotel and water system paid him generously, the toll road remained his most cherished enterprise.

And so it is understandable that Mort should be more than a little displeased when, one day, he learned that the Inyo County Board of Supervisors had, by a 2-1 vote, approved a franchise for a competing road.

He gave this unexpected development some thought, and then set in motion a campaign to circumvent those brash enough to challenge the master of Cerro Gordo.

In time and money, it was expensive, but the end justified the cost.

A few months later the supervisors called for a review of the vexatious franchise. Then, [illegible] again by a 2-1 vote, it was summarily revoked.

For one of the two board members who earlier opposed Mort had lost out in his bid for re-election and his successor was a more friendly supervisor - Belshaw himself.

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Cerro Gordo: 'The Fat Hill'

The rich mines at Cerro Gordo represented the most significant silver strike in Inyo County. The development of Cerro Gordo spurred investment and growth in the young county. The impact of the mines was far-reaching. The mining camp created a nearby market for the product from local ranches and farms. The need to move men and material to the mines and bring ore out for processing prompted the construction of roads and led to the short-lived success of the famed Owens Lake steamships. Faraway Los Angeles also benefited. The need to supply the mining town with everything from shovels to pants to food spurred the growth of a wide array of businesses in the sleepy city.

That is a very impressive list of accomplishments and achievements for a mining town that had a surprisingly short life span.

Silver was discovered in the Inyo Range east of Owens Lake by Pablo Flores in 1865. For several years, Flores and other miners from Mexico quietly worked shallow deposits on the claims they filed, smelting the ore they recovered in simple vaso furnaces. The Lone Pine Mining District, which included Cerro Gordo, was formed on April 5, 1866.

However, it was a little more than a full year later that word of the riches at Cerro Gordo attracted miners' and the public's attention. Mortimer W. Belshaw was one of the first to arrive after word of Cerro Gordo spread. In May 1868, Belshaw obtained a one-third interest in the Union Mine by promising Joaquin Almada, the mine's owner, a one-fifth interest in the smelter he planned to build on "Fat Hill."

Within a few months, Belshaw had graded the steep eight-mile-long Yellow Grade Road from the base of the Inyos and began hauling machinery for a smelter that would eventually produce five tons of silver-lead bullion per day. In 1870, Victor Beaudry built a blast furnace similar to Belshaw's – and Cerro Gordo's output of bullion increased to nine tons per day. By that time, well over 900 claims had been filed, and a sizable mining camp with stage service to Independence had sprung up at the top of the Yellow Grade Road.

Between 1872 and 1874, all of the Cerro Gordo mines became indebted to the furnaces owned by Belshaw and Beaudry, which left the two men in control of the entire hill.

In December 1868, a contract was awarded to freighter Remi Nadeau and regular ore shipments to San Francisco via Los Angeles began immediately thereafter. The haul from Cerro Gordo to Los Angeles by freight team took from three to four weeks, with the trip to San Francisco by steamer from the wharf at San Pedro adding an additional three more days to the journey. Nadeau kept perfecting his freighting operation, and in 1870 was able to deliver a total of 700 tons of bullion to the wharf at San Pedro by keeping 32 teams in constant motion.

Nadeau's teams delivered wagonloads of bullion worth $50,000 nearly every day of the year, and hauled machinery, grain, wine and brandy, and other goods purchased in the Los Angeles area on the return trip. This trade caused Los Angeles to grow from a small pueblo into a bustling supply and shipping center that served the mines of Inyo County.

Nadeau's freighting contract ended in December 1871, and a new contract was awarded to James Brady. Brady had already built a smelter at the town of Swansea near the foot of the Yellow Grade Road, and he now set about building a small 85-foot steamer to transport bullion to the west side of Owens Lake. The Bessie Brady began plying the waters of Owens Lake in 1872, carrying as much as 70 tons of bullion per day and saving freight wagons between three and five days of travel over roads through deep sand. However, this only transferred the problem from one side of the lake to the other, and stacks of bullion that had once accumulated at Swansea – because freight wagons were unable to keep pace with Cerro Gordo's output – now began to pile up at Cartago.

Heavy rains in the fall of 1872 made roads virtually impassable, and an outbreak of epizootic in March 1873 caused even greater freighting complications. The number of ingots of bullion awaiting shipment to Los Angeles had grown to 30,000 by May. In desperation, Beaudry and Belshaw met with Nadeau and cut a deal. By June 1873, Nadeau was once again hauling Cerro Gordo's bullion to Los Angeles, now under the auspices of the newly formed Cerro Gordo Freighting Company. As part of the deal struck with Nadeau, Beaudry and Belshaw agreed to spend $150,000 to establish a line of freight stations between the foot of the Yellow Grade Road and Los Angeles. The stations were spaced at 13- to 20-mile intervals, equal to a day's haul.

Nadeau's teams hauled away the backlog of bullion while Belshaw upgraded Cerro Gordo's furnaces and mills. When production resumed, Cerro Gordo's output doubled from that of 1871; but the Cerro Gordo Freighting Company's teams, which now numbered 80, were up to the task. Around 50 of the teams, each hauling a set of three high-sided wagons with a total capacity of 10 tons, made trips back and forth between two of the stations. Ingots of silver-lead bullion were carried on the southbound lap, and merchandise was hauled north on the return lap. The rest of the teams supplied the stations with barley and hay for the freight teams.

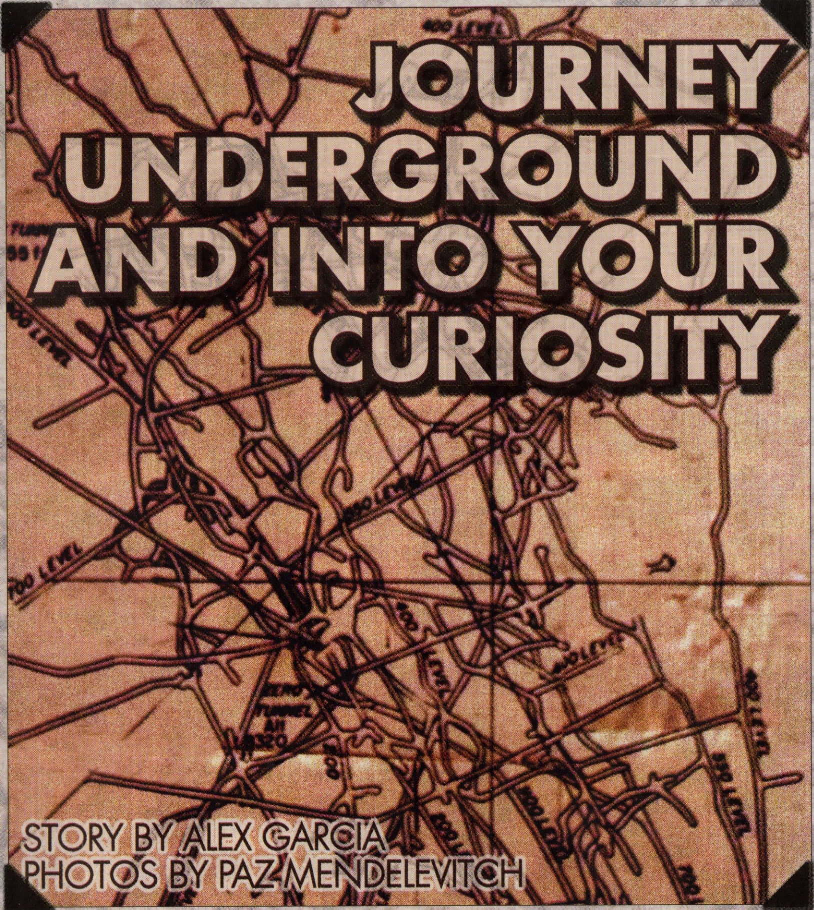
The view from above Cerro Gordo, looking down on Owens Lake, circa 1910.

By 1876, time was starting to run out for Cerro Gordo, and in December of that year Belshaw's furnace shut down. Beaudry kept his furnace in operation for several more years, but it finally shut down in November 1879 and Nadeau soon hauled away the last of Cerro Gordo's bullion. Cerro Gordo was reactivated circa 1905, and in 1909 a six-mile-long gravity powered tram was built to carry ore to the bottom of the grade. The tram was plagued by frequent breakdowns, during which time teamsters were hired to transport ore to the Four Metals Mining Company smelter at the foot of Yellow Grade Road.

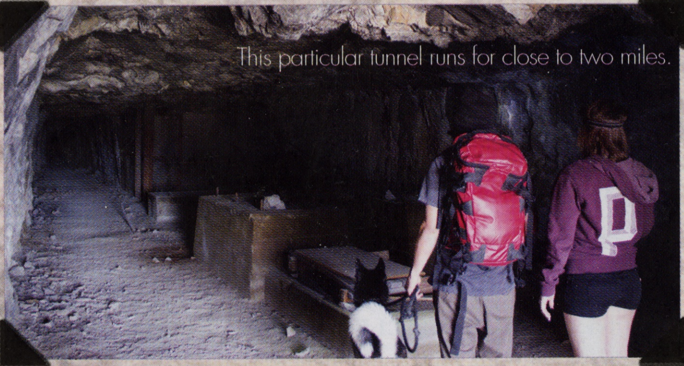
In 1911, zinc deposits were developed and the tram built in 1909 was replaced with a 29,560 foot-long Leschen aerial tramway. This system was capable of transporting 16-20 tons of ore per hour to the railroad terminus at Keeler. Cerro Gordo became one of the major producers of high-grade zinc ore in the United States during this second boom period. The mines were worked steadily for zinc until 1915 and then intermittently until 1933.

2014

JOURNEY UNDERGROUND AND INTO YOUR CURIOSITY



STORY BY ALEX GARCIA
PHOTOS BY PAZ MENDELEVITCH



This particular tunnel runs for close to two miles.

Tucked into one of the Eastern Sierra's many ranges, lies one beast of a historical 4x4 adventure; this place sits quietly, shrouded in mystery and capable of leaving common sense completely behind, courtesy of curiosity.

Initially, I was inclined to tell a tale of adrenaline and exploration and brief bouts of chaos when warning signs went unheeded, but after experiencing this beautifully dilapidated place one long afternoon, I became addicted to several aspects of it, and found myself back there after only one week with a different sense of appreciation and intent. I was not only hungry for adventure at that point, but just as much for knowledge, as well.

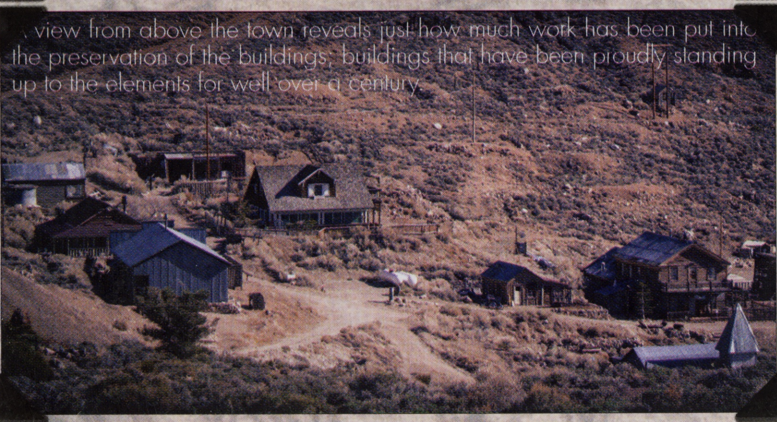
Robert Desmarais, a man who lives nearly 5,000 feet above the dusty valley floor below, is almost solely responsible for kindling my craving to know more about this place; his passion for where he calls home, infectious.

See, Robert knows more about this place than any book you can find in a library on the East Side, and this becomes apparent within minutes of speaking to him. A certified miner, father of a current Air Force pilot and in a previous life, a Highschool mechanics teacher and student assistance councelor, Robert is a contemporary all-around badass who braves the harsh year-round seasonal climate swings, intimidating wildlife and scarce resources in the name of preservation.

What is Robert preserving you may ask?

Robert is preserving and restoring, day in and day out (with the help of his wife) an old mining town that boomed well over a century ago and was said to have funded and shaped Los Angeles in its earliest days.

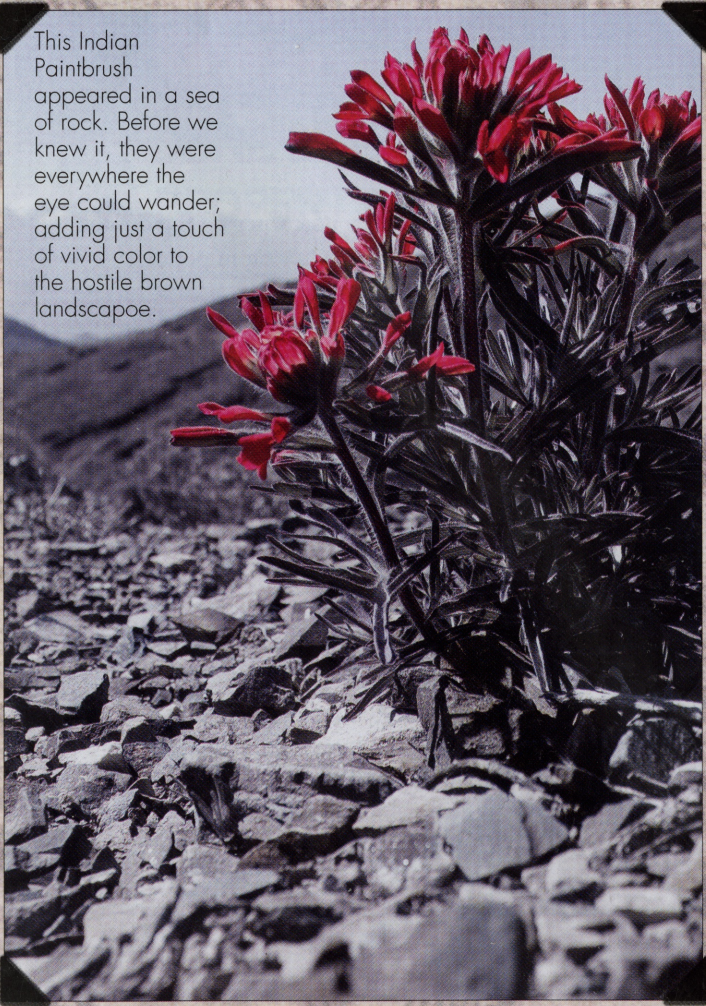
The artifacts that live in the museum are in remarkable conditon given their age; it's almost as if these mines are still in use...



A view from above the town reveals just how much work has been put into the preservation of the buildings; buildings that have been proudly standing up to the elements for well over a century.

As we made our way north of the town via trail, a view of the entire road descending the mountain appeared. The Sierra Nevada was just barely visible through the murky atmosphere filling the valley, and so we paused when the trail permitted, and allowed the view to invade our senses with beauty for an quick moment. Back to reality. The shale road, which undoubtedly evolved into what it is today by sliding down the mountainside, sat off-axis for the majority of the traverse, and eventually became a massive tallus field, extending to the ground and unpassable by anything on wheels. The road ended, and we peered off into the distance through binoculars, wondering how anyone could have possibly traveled any of these roads on a regular basis.

This Indian Paintbrush appeared in a sea of rock. Before we knew it, they were everywhere the eye could wander; adding just a touch of vivid color to the hostile brown landscapoe.



Over 700 claims give way to dozens of miles of mining tunnels, audits and shafts underground; the scale of what was once a massive operation, completely captivating to the modern-day explorer.

Relics from the past litter the forgotten landscape, inspiring questions at a faster rate than answers can be produced—even with a resource as valuable as Robert so close by.

The town isn't for the everyday sightseer though; it's nestled in a maze of 4x4 roads and fortified by high desert vegetation that'll cut you up faster than the barbed wire protecting you from your own foolishness—foolishness that's continuously nurtured by thoughts like "what's in there," and "where might this lead?"

I battled my own foolishness on several occasions while out there.

I peered through board barriers into tunnels in the mountainside. They vented freezing cold air into my face, indicating to me that they weren't, by any means, shallow.

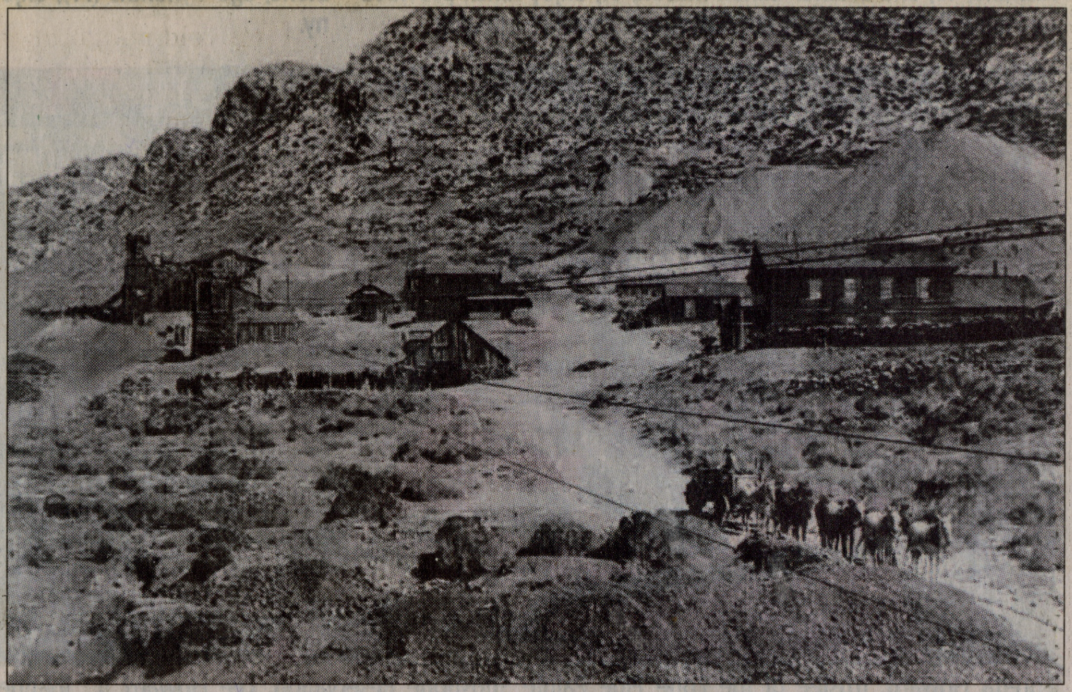
A traverse outside of the town had 10 knuckles white and my eyes fiercely glued open. Precision was more than just the name of the driving game on one of this mountain's switchbacks. The temptation to hike off of the main road was just barely curbed by the awareness of the wildlife indigenous to these hills, some of which was of the rattling variety.

Extreme care was needed out there if self-preservation was to remain a priority.

Despite two day-trips to visit Robert, I've yet to be satisfied with my own degree of exploration.

As I descended the mountains, questions multiplied in my head and new trails became apparent—looking ripe for wandering in all directions in my Jeep's lowest gears.

Luckily for me, one of the buildings that have been restored is the old bunkhouse, and because it's available to reserve for multi-day trips, a longer stay filled with wonder, investigation and fascinating conversation with Robert is in line.



Cerro Gordo, circa 1910, showing a team of mules hauling freight and the aerial tram that was installed to move ore from the mines down to the valley floor.

Owens Valley History

OATH OF OFFICE

By Dave Babb

A copy of a somewhat unusual document was found at Cerro Gordo in 1880 - - following a series of fires that destroyed several buildings at that place. It appeares that a young man, possibly guilty of some minor infractions around the town, was elected to act as Constable - - to enforce the laws of the Fat Hill.

Since I can't think of a better way to describe or paraphrase the contents of that "official" document, you might want to read it for yourselves - - as it was written.

Solemn Oath Of Office Of J. Briscoe, esq.,
Elected To The Honorable Office of Constable Of Said Domain:

I, John Briscoe, a citizen of the United States, a little over twenty years of age, do positively swear, allege and affirm that I will truthfully, soberly, honorably, cautiously and faithfully obey the flaws of laws, and perform the duties of Constable in and for the Fifth Township.

That I will steal no more poles, but will protect personal, real, public and private property of the citizens of Cerro Gordo and vicinage; that I will arrest and safely keep in durance vile each and every inebriate found at an undue hour surveying the streets of our city and commonwealth; that I will arrest and dignifiedly keep, lodge and feed, and instruct any persons, tramp or tramps, found possessed of or lugging about any pistols, Henri rifles, mountain or prairie fowling pieces, Bowie knives, slung-shots, cutlasses and other implements usually had, carried by, and characteristic of bushwhackers, pirates and free-lunchers. That I will with agility, courage, bravery, without compunction, and with aclaricity obey the laws and bylaws of this Cerro Gordo metropolis - - whose domains extend far beyond the reach of future surveyors and astronomers, with their tripods and appendages usually had and tugged about by such wise savages and destroyers of the human family's equilibrium.

I further unwittingly promise to (with a kind eye and benevolent heart) have a brotherly feeling toward all men; to contemplate with serenity and vicissitude inherent to the family of walking vegetables, a la theory Darwin. That I will protect my fellow man, provide for the needy and the sick, the widows and the fatherless; inquire into all matters of any interest to the people of this district, town and village. To protect the citizens of this Phat Hill against encroachments from the various tribes that inhabit the Owens River Valley and the tributaries on one side and Malayan colonies of Darwin and Panamint on the other.

Yes, I do! I will!

John Briscoe

September 5, 1879

So, it would appear that even in the wild, and at times lawless, mining center of Cerro Gordo in the late 19th century, there was always an occasion to display a sense of humor.

A pile of lead/silver ingots sit on a freight dock near Keeler waiting to be taken to Los Angeles for final processing, circa 1890. The 75-pound ingots were 99 percent lead and usually less than 1 percent silver.

Two miners (one of them holding his pick ax like a guitar) at Cerro Gordo circa 1900. This photo can also be found in the museum's newly released 2015 calendar.

Caretaking the Ghost of Cerro Gordo

By Christopher Langley
Photography by Osceola Refetoff

High and Dry – dispatches from the land of little rain

(Editor's note: The following is a dispatch from "High and Dry – Dispatches from the Land of Little Rain.")

> *"They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."*
> – Samuel Beckett, "Waiting for Godot"

No wonder Spiritualism, séances, mediums and visits with the dead took place in the dark of the 1800s. In the days when the streets, houses and buildings were not well lit, it was easy to experience the night full of spectral creatures, boogie men and things that go bump in the night.

In the daylight, I found Cerro Gordo, a mining camp that dates back to the mid 1870s, a charming rustic collection of period houses and weathered wood skeletons on the verge of tumbling in on themselves.

Ah, but the night is quite different. Darkness envelopes me, as I caretake the ghosts here.

As the sun drops over the hills to the west and the Sierra Nevada crest behind, the landscape transforms into shadows of beasts and other phantasmagoria. It is peaceful as the thermal winds drop. The stars come out and satellites glide across the firmament.

The Belshaw house cools. Footsteps cross on creaking

S

Clockwise from far left photo: Falling down house on the hill – infrared exposure, Cerro Gordo, 2014; Tramway ramp remains No. 1 – infrared exposure, Cerro Gordo, 2014, and Hanging Chains, Cerro Gordo, 2014.

floor planks in the house, tickling my over-active imagination. Mortimer Belshaw and Victor Beaudry were the first partners to own these mines. I know the silver from Cerro Gordo kick-started Los Angeles, as it was shipped out of San Pedro Harbor to be processed at the San Francisco Mint.

I think, life is good if isolated at 8,200 feet. Then comes Wednesday night, and the first night of wind. The dark world here and days without visitors have made me sensitive to the environmental sounds I otherwise never hear in the noise of my every day life. The darkness makes me more able to hear each grate, rasp, creak or complaint of dry boney limbs of the desiccated trees tapping at the window. There are the gusts that shake the old house, and the whistling, whining, grumbling, moaning, groaning gasps of the high desert winds. The world is alive with other worldly spirits.

Cerro Gordo can easily be filled with wanton regret of all those who lived and worked here. There are the prostitutes in the cribs, the starving Indians whose pinion crops were destroyed for firewood, and the miners who broke their spirits on hard rock and unfulfilled dreams.

I dismiss the suffering, the whining of those phantoms long dead and instead think, "Isn't this all so cool to be spending a week caretaking a ghost town?"

But in the cemetery where the dead residents are buried, there are subtle signs hinting to me that nearly 300 forgotten souls are interred there in unmarked graves.

When the living departed after the mines played out, they took everything they could. They left only these decaying memories behind.

On the second night the sun starts to set, and shadows grow long. The mysterious deep shadows hide the entrances to the underground; I think about something. Suppose I have angered the ghosts by not truly remembering them and their lives, respecting their loves and losses. Tonight they will be about, and perhaps, just perhaps, come knocking at the door of the Belshaw house. What then?

Now the night wind keens my name. The only real corpse is the town itself. The wind soughs through the trees whispering to me. Loneliness creeps into Cerro Gordo softly on slippered feet following the

See page 22

Continued from page 13
shadows of the sun's dwindling rule.

Light a candle and wait for the ghosts and tommy-knockers to come calling, I laugh. Now I will welcome their humorless grievances murmuring in my ears, as long as it doesn't sound like the unsympathetic wind.

Earlier today, the second day of agitated weather, the south wind thundered in the eaves of this old house, but with the cooling evening, the hard gales are dropping temporarily to zephyrs. It is quieting down and my loneliness is filling my heart with the remorse of living too long without the assurance that loved ones will not die or fade away. The silence allows for thought, which cajoles remorse and disappointment instead of victory.

Deep in my past there is the ghost of a little boy who wasn't loved enough. I got him to come out and play with me but still he walks in the lonely dank alleys of the human heart. I now begin to think I have nothing to offer others: nothing to offer myself.

I feel a great personal sadness in this place of much human suffering. The winds return. I hear a knocking at the foundation in a gust of wind. Is that a lonely child who was murdered in his ancient bed? Is it a young man forced to walk the dusty streets, stumbling on hidden rocks, condemned to never have but temporarily what he needs continually. Loneliness can breed selfishness. I have lived well with many blessings. Bitterness is unwarranted yet must be constantly vanquished.

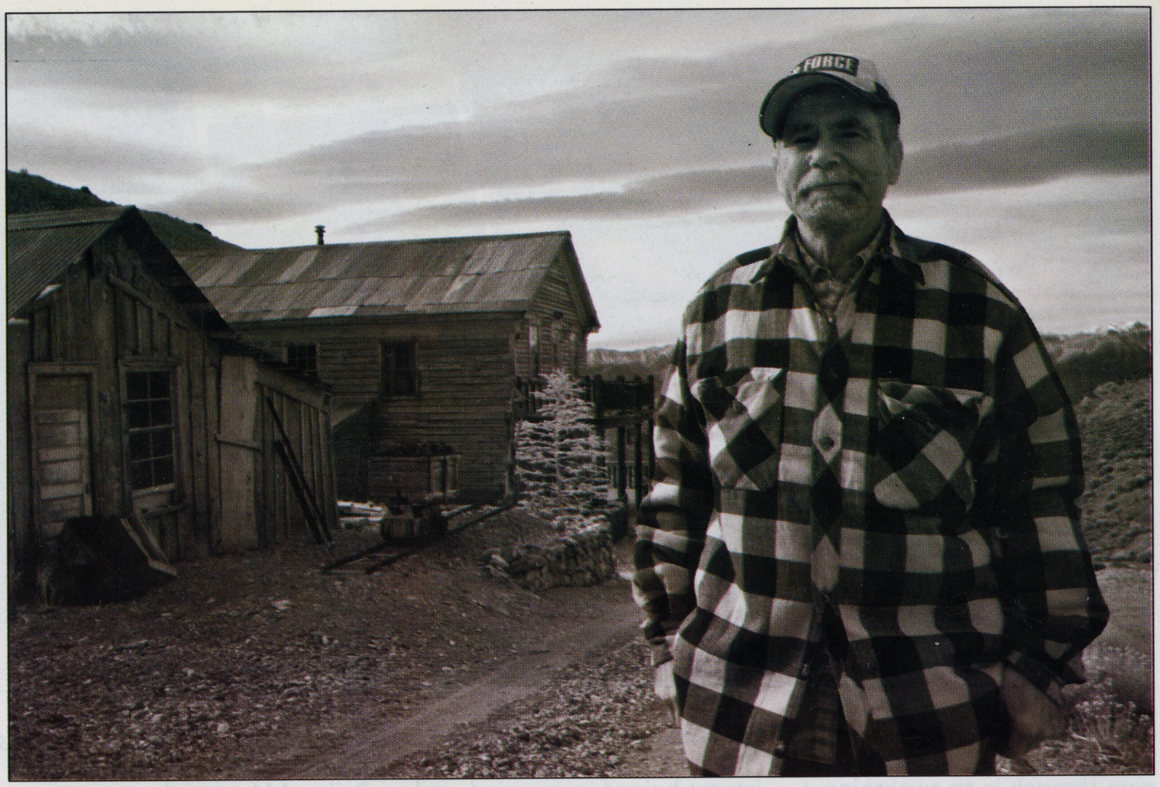
There are chains rattling in the veiled night. Are they the ones I saw earlier, looped over the desiccated fence posts, now clanging in the dark? Or are they moldy bones loosely attached by dried sinews scrambling from the stony graves in the ancient cemetery on the hill? Have they come to mock my night of loneliness when they are condemned to an eternity of solitude?

Faith and hope are lovely in the daylight but seem wan and pale this windy tortured dry night. Now I hear the wind again, thumping at the shingles, asking coldly to come in and bring me comfort. The dead bring no comfort to the lonely. Nor do they bring the succor of faith or peace of tranquility.

It is a crowded night, filled with the ghosts of my long life. Some are people I loved and lost, some are people I failed to love enough. There is scraping, like the scourging of flesh from bones. Or is that simply leaves fluttering nervously against the windowpane? I am forlorn, but not totally alone for in the wind are other friendless spirits, forsaken and abandoned, unremembered by the living. These heartless phantoms can only bring cold comfort.

Tomorrow life will return to normal. The people I know will signal their allegiance and just maybe their love. But tonight the desert wind has vacuumed my heart empty of the solace of any other living human being with a warm and comforting touch nearby.

To explore more High & Dry: www.desertdispatches.com - http://www.facebook.com/highanddry. We welcome your questions and comments.



Photos by Osceola Refetoff

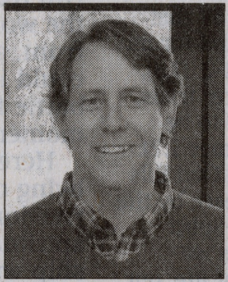
Robert Desmarais No. 1 – Infrared Exposure Cerro Gordo, 2012. Desmarais is Cerro Gordo's sentinel on the hill, guarding it 24/7, almost 365. He and his wife, Sandy, are the permanent residents of this desolate remnant of California history. His "ghostly" appearance is due to the infrared exposure.

The Old Yellow Grade Road, with a dust storm on Owens Lake below, Cerro Gordo, 2012.

Significant Details 9-7-2018

Here is a great way to use Cerro Gordo

What a deal. Hand over a little less than a million bucks and you can own Cerro Gordo. The semi-abandoned old silver town has a few pretty nice buildings, a few ghosts for marketing purposes and plenty of other buildings. Two questions on everyone's mind: Who would want a ghost town perched on 300 acres high in the desert mountains, roughly between the Owens Valley and Death Valley National Park? And once you bought it, what would you do with it?



JON KLUSMIRE
OPINION

After just a few moments of thinking (which is about the outer limit for your humble columnist), there does seem to be at least one great prospect that could truly benefit from this tantalizing real estate opportunity: the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District. And why, pray tell, would the Air Police want Cerro Gordo? Consider: the Clean Air Crew is in an ongoing battle with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power over putting the finishing touches on the Owens Lake dust bowl, and is getting ready for a similar tussle over Mono Lake.

So Cerro Gordo could become the "conference center" for the district. The next meeting with LADWP would take place at Cerro Gordo. Even in the nice hotel, heat and cooling are not really an option and the outhouse is the primary amenity, but they are there to work, not vacation.

Once everyone settles in and gets comfy, the LADWP folks can safely be told the vans that drove them up the extremely steep Yellow Grade Road have been sent back down the hill to Lone Pine to get their brakes checked. Don't worry, though, they will be back as soon as the drivers see the smoke signals that signal the negotiations are over. (The smoke signals are a clever touch for an Air Pollution Control District. Hee, hee, hee.)

So, time to get down to negotiations.

Wait, food? The LADWP folks want food? Well, there is some bottled water and crackers. Why yes, the Great Basin folks did bring roast beef sandwiches, a nice salad, some apple pie and jug of ice tea. So?

Before starting the big discussion about the ongoing Owens Lake work, they can all take a stroll outside and look down on the Owens Dry Lake and take a big, clean breath of mountain air. The LADWP folks can also ponder just how long it would take to walk down the Yellow Grade Road back to civilization. Well, okay, after a couple of hours they would get to Keeler, then down the road a bit further to the huge DWP Owens Lake HQ. Just the thought of it should make the old penny loafers groan.

Wait, are those the vans coming up the road? Well, sort of. They are vans carrying the Inyo County Attorney, and he's got all the paperwork for the lawsuit Inyo County filed against LADWP. You know the one. The county wants to get control of its own dumps by condemning its own dumps (sorry, "solid waste disposal and recycling sites") so it can kick out the current landowner, which is none other than LADWP. Oh wait, those are settlement papers. My bad.

So, here's the deal: LADWP can agree to all the "dust control" measures at Owens Lake and Mono Lake, and then turn over the dumps to Inyo County.

If they say "no"?

Well, the Dust Busters and Inyo County Legal Beagles will just take the roast beef sandwiches, climb in the vans and go to Lone Pine for a round of beers.

The LADWP folks can ponder their situation, and then light the signal fire and send up a smoke signal when they decide they would like to "make a deal." Oh, and no air pollution violation for the smoke signal.

(Jon Klusmire of Bishop would volunteer to be the Outhouse Attendant during the "negotiations.")

Travel Channel's 'Legendary Locations' takes over Cerro Gordo

Register Staff 11-22-2018

Gunfire broke out between miners over some saloon women in Cerro Gordo on Tuesday, Nov. 12, it was reported. Luckily, no one was hurt as it was a scene for Travel Channel's "Legendary Locations" now filming its second season under the direction of Chris C. Parker.

Parker contacted Inyo Film Commissioner Chris Langley on the afternoon of Oct.31, writing he was also the producing putting together a shoot up at Cerro Gordo. "I am told you are the man to talk to about all of this so I would love to set up a time to jump on the phone and talk about something. I just got off the phone with Kelley (Mooney one of the owners of the town) and anything she couldn't answer got a response of: 'I'm not sure but Chris would know.'" Chris (friends call him Parker he said) continued "Anyway, I have lots of questions about actors/extras, props, costumes, can we get a mule up there, etc. etc. etc. I am super excited to have you involved in all of this and can't wait to get the ball rolling! It's going to be so great."

The great Cerro Gordo film adventure had begun. After talking to Parker for a while, it was agreed that he needed to come up and see Cerro Gordo first off. Parker, Langley and Manuel Ruiz travelled the dusty winding road up to the old historic mining town. Trying to figure out who would cater the event, the film commissioner contacted Susan Jefferson Bopp who had fed many a pack outfit. She said she was interested but had never been to Cerro Gordo. So she and her husband, Don Bopp, joined the short caravan up the hill.

Once Parker had an accurate understanding of all the strategic challenges, he was back to the city and started building a local team. Larry Holzhauser was standing in for official caretaker Robert Demarais, who was off with his wife celebrating their anniversary back East. Realizing how useful Manuel, who had filmed in Cerro Gordo several times would be, Parker hired him for four days work. A jack of all movie trades, Manuel states, "My involvement was as an on-set production assistant, actor, and casting in pre-production." The Bopps agreed to cater the two days even though the beautiful kitchen in the American Hotel up on fat hill did not have water nor propane as Parker had made clear.

The film commissioner took on finding two mules for the production. Parker seemed to have his heart set on it. Lee and Jennifer Roesser were going to be out of town but recommended Norman Mull. Turned out he was also going to be out of town on a film shoot in L.A. He suggested Bobby Tanner who was going to be involved in another film project in probably February outside Bishop. Parker spoke with him but realized the expense of bringing two mules all the way up to Cerro Gordo was beyond his budget. It was the only thing he didn't get from his team.

Period costuming was perhaps the single biggest challenge but the team asked Sharon Avey of Independence to help, and she answered the call.

Casting was challenging because of various personal commitments like jobs, families and travel that interfered. Ruiz comments, "Most difficulty during pre-production was securing local talent. Being most of the actors hired do not act regularly, or at all for that matter. Most had their own jobs and obligations that would get in the way of the filming schedule. Tom Snyder County Schools Deputy Superintendent had written when he been tapped for a job, "Thanks for the tip on this opportunity. I've been wanting to see Cerro Gordo for quite some time and now I've got this big break in my acting career as a bonus."

So leading up to the production, there were numerous drop outs. So much so, two of the significant roles were not cast until the night before filming began." Another challenge to Parker as well as casting was that there were large and late changes in the script. Roger and Cecille Vargo, longtime associated with the history of the area, and authors of two books on Cerro Gordo, were asked to help the script writer with the facts. First, original owner of the mine Belshaw and the famous bandit Vasquez were main characters. The production wanted look-alikes as close as possible. A few days later they were dropped and Lola Travis, a madam and the first powerful business woman of Lone Pine was added. She was not easy to find an actor to play her. One photograph is known to exist and interestingly it was framed on the bar in the American Hotel. Roger pointed out the bar there now was not the original one. In fact ,the building was the cafeteria/ dining room where the miners were fed which explained the large kitchen that abutted the main hall.

Roger and Cecille both mentioned the speed at which the script, and filming proceeded. "This was a very pleasant experience. Lisa (writer) and Chris (Parker) were professionals. We were surprised with how fast things moved. We were asked to help with historical research in early November. We expected script development and pre-production would take months and actual filming wouldn't take place until sometime in 2019." Cecille observed, "Chris (Parker) and the crew were also respectful of the historical aspects of Cerro Gordo and didn't try to disassemble things or climb in unsafe location."

The couple was surprised by "the speed and efficiency of the crew and how well the cast worked together." Roger said, "I was fascinated with the hardships the residents endured. I enjoy mining history but I've learned, too, that mining is difficult and dangerous work . I think there's also an aspect of diversity of the people who lived and worked there over the years...."

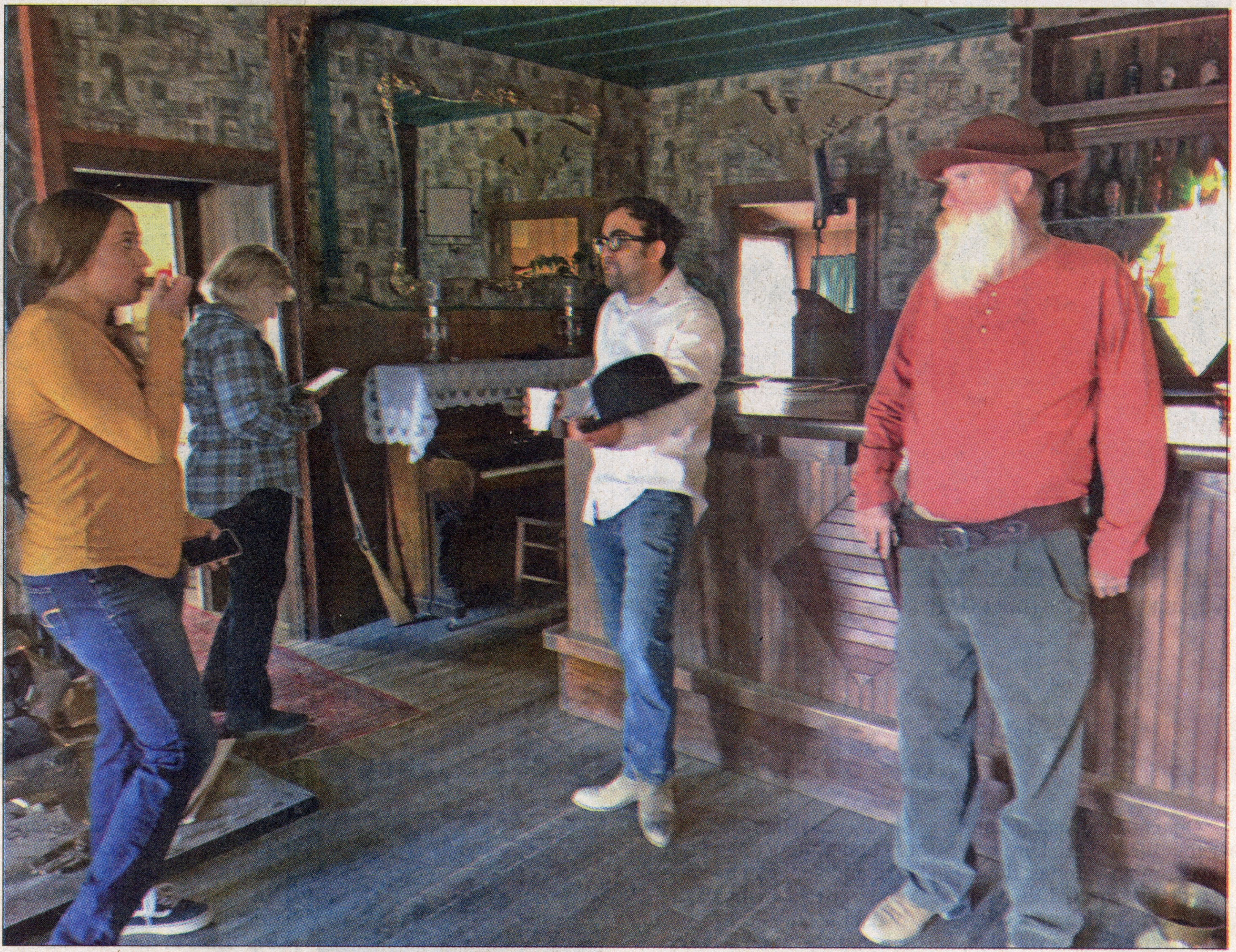
"Preserving Cerro Gordo's history is important. A lot was never properly recorded or was lost. Unlike Bodie, the fragments of Cerro Gordo history are smaller. We are committed to understanding and preserving the history and actively working with the new owners."

On Monday the film commissioner brought Inyo County Supervisor of District 5 Matt Kingsley up to Cerro Gordo to meet three of the new owners, watch the first day of filming with drones, and see the restorative work going on in one of the houses. Called "adapted reuse" the floors were being restored to their original condition as well as many other things cleaned, repainted, or repaired. This house will provide accommodations for early visitors. Owners Brent Underwood, Jon Bier,` and Kelley Mooney were on site observing all that was underway. They are committed to preserving and protecting the historic heritage while adapting the site for retreats, events, and seminars. Underwood is a book marketer with an "adapted reuse" project hostel HK Austin (Texas). Bier is a martial arts fighter trainer currently living in Venice, California, and owner of a boutique public relations agency Jack Taylor PR. Mooney works for Hulu streaming service as Director of Integrated Marketing.

Ruiz observes, "The biggest challenge is capturing the authenticity of the time period and setting. You want to make sure you are staying true to the story. Yes, I am currently writing a story that takes place in the early 1800s leading into the mid 1930s. The biggest challenge for, this docu-drama, is doing the research." Avey had a big challenge because she knew few of the actors, or their sizes, so she had to bring up various sizes that were period, wigs and accessories. It is through her knowledge of period clothing her collection she was able to be as successful as she was.

In closing Ruiz seemed to capture the enthusiasm of everyone. "The most fun was the day that called for local actors. It was fun getting to work on it with people I was familiar with, while also enjoying watching everyone learn the on-set process of filming. Most difficult during filming – the cold. Both days the temperature started at 30 degrees approximately before the sun was up, reaching 60 by the hottest part of the day ."

That sums up the glamor of shooting a film some days for our locals.



From left, Nicole Peralto, Sharon Avey, Manuel Ruiz and Dusty Bamburg on the set in Cerro Gordo.

Photos courtesy of Chris Langley

Manuel Ruiz checks out his wanted poster.

Huge piece of Inyo history is up for sale

For $925,000 one could have 'the rare opportunity to own your own ghost town …'

By Jon Klusmire
Register Correspondent

6-9-2018

The 300-acre Cerro Gordo mining town above Keeler has been listed for sale for $925,000. The mine and mining camp took shape in the 1860s and was the first successful and profitable mine in Inyo County. Its silver was shipped to Los Angles, thus creating a "silver thread" that linked the small, coastal city with the rugged desert and mountain country of Inyo County. Smaller scale mining operations continued into the 1920s before the town and mines were abandoned.

The privately owned mine and ghost town are in a "state of stable decay," said Jake Rasmuson, the listing agent at Bishop Realty. Although the listing notes there are 22 buildings in the town, Rasmuson said that might be a bit of an overstatement, depending on one's definition of a "building." However, more than a few buildings have been restored. The American Hotel, built in 1871, has served as a bed and breakfast in past years.

The town and mine all rest on patented mining claims, some dating to the 1860s.

The property is being sold by the three sons of Mike Patterson, who took ownership on their dad's death in 2016. There was no single event that led to the decision to sell the unique property. Mike and wife, Jody Patterson, started maintaining and stabilizing the mine shafts and the town's buildings in 1985. "They poured their heart and soul into Cerro Gordo," Rasmuson said. "And now it's time for someone else to take over."

Judging by the interested generated by numerous online listing services, there are more than a few folks interested in "the rare opportunity to own your own ghost

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The view from above Cerro Gordo, looking down on Owens Lake, circa 1910.

Eastern California Museum photo

TOWN

Continued from front page

town and mining operation," as the Zillow online real estate listing states.

That site had about 25,000 "views" on the first day it was online, said Rasmuson.

Cerro Gordo has long and storied history.

Groups of Mexican miners started prospecting and mining activity in 1862, four years before Inyo County became a county. They named the spot, Cerro Gordo, which is "Fat Hill" in Spanish. By 1867, a smelter was at work and word of the silver lodes reached scores of treasure-seeking miners. By the 1870s, two smelters were at work in Cerro Gordo, and another in Swansea, on the shores of the Owens Lake. Ore was hauled down the treacherously steep "Yellow Grade" road in huge freight wagons.

Freighter Remi Nadeau took the first load of silver and lead ingots to Los Angeles, 275 miles away. He eventually hauled 20 tons of ore a month to Los Angeles. The silver shipments provided a cash boost to the small city.

Cerro Gordo boomed to a population of about 4,500 residents and around 1,700 mules. The town was notoriously violent, with reports of at least one shooting or murder a day, thanks to claim jumpers, plenty of saloons, brothels and drunk miners and no law enforcement.

The 1880s also saw the arrival of the steamships on the Owens Lake. The Molly Stevens was first. Its engines were installed in the Bessie Brady, which promptly caught fire and sank at the dock. It had no silver on it when it sank, a fact treasure hunters ignore while "looking" for the "sunken treasure of Owens Lake." The Cottonwood Sawmill and charcoal kilns, on the west side of the lake, were built to supply wood and charcoal to Cerro Gordo.

The boom didn't last, however.

In 1875, the mines were playing out, which meant the smelters shut down. Dropping silver prices kept the mines shuttered, and by the 1870s, the first Cerro Gordo boom had gone bust.

Mining was revived in the early 1900s, when the old ore piles were processed and produced zinc. An aerial tram was built to haul the ore to Keeler. That boom was short-lived, however, and by the 1920s, mining activity pretty much stopped.

The ghost town era came to an end in 1985 when Jody Stewart, who bought the town and mine from relatives, and Mike Patterson started stabilizing the buildings. The two eventually married. The town came to life with the two-story American Hotel serving guests who toured the hoist house and bunk house. The general store served as a well-stocked museum. In the summer, several thousand visitors explored the town and mine. Over the years the couple cleaned up and stabilized many of the town's buildings and secured the mine shafts.

Their work left the "ghost town" in remarkably good shape, which is probably one of many selling points that could attract a new owner to the historic town.

Two miners (one of them holding his pick ax like a guitar) at Cerro Gordo circa 1900.

Eastern California Museum photo

The view from above Cerro Gordo, looking down on Owens Lake, circa 1910.

7-19-2018

Eastern California Museum photo

Improvements to old mining town planned

By Jon Klusmire
Register Correspondent

When the Cerro Gordo mining town was put up for sale in June, the novelty of selling an entire town that reeked of Western history generated huge waves of publicity from national and international media.

That publicity caught the eye of two young public relations professionals who recently purchased the 300-acre site for $1.4 million, nearly half a million dollars more than the original asking price. The two primary investors, Brent Underwood and John Bier, said they intend to keep the site and its 22 buildings open to the public and for tours and will eventually make substantial improvements and offer Cerro Gordo as a location for a unique lodging experience and a variety of events or programs.

Pitched as both a rough and tumble mining town, a piece of vital California and Eastern Sierra history, and a ghost town, when Bishop Realty Broker Jake Rasmuson put the listing online the story was irresistible to real estate and news outlets. Within days, regional and national news outlets such as the San Francisco Chronicle, Time magazine and Business Insider ran with the story. Following closely behind were television reports on Fox News, CNN, MSN and a memorable segment on Good Morning Phoenix.

"It was a blast," Rasmuson said of all the media attention created by the Cerro Gordo listing and promotions.

All that publicity also did its primary job: generating leads and multiple offers for the property, which is located in the mountains above Keeler on the edge of Death Valley National Park.

Rasmuson said he received "about a dozen offers" in a very short time. The final sales price of $1.4 million was higher than the $925,000 list price, and Rasmuson said some of the offers were nearly $2 million. Various uses were proposed by potential buyers, from a cannabis operation to a theme park. He said Underwood and Bier's offer was taken by the sellers because their plans included retaining most of the historic buildings and opening the site to the public.

In a nice twist, Ramsuson confirmed the sale of Cerro

See TOWN ▶ Page 3

Group buys Cerro Gordo

TOWN

Continued from front page

Gordo, which was called a Ghost Town in many media stories, closed on Friday the 13th.

"The buyers were great," Rasmuson said of the principal investors. "They are very excited, and they are young, intelligent and energetic."

The two new owners of Cerro Gordo were at their new property to close the deal. Underwood told the Los Angeles Times that to celebrate their purchase they poured themselves a shot of whiskey at the bar in the restored American Hotel.

. The property is being sold by the three sons of Mike Patterson, who took ownership on their dad's death in 2016. Mike and wife Jody Patterson started maintaining and stabilizing the mine shafts and the town's buildings in 1985.

Primary investor Underwood owns HK Austin, an award winning hostel in Austin, Texas, and is the principle of Brass Check, a media and public relations firm representing authors and other creative clients. John Bier heads Jack Taylor, a public relations firm with offices in Los Angeles and New York. The five minority owns are an assortment of marketing, PR and social media executives and business owners.

The pair proved their PR chops by quickly giving interviews to CNN, the *LA Times* and The Real Deal, *LA Real Estate News*, and several Los Angeles television stations.

Underwood told the Real Deal that he had been looking for a "hospitality location that was interesting and unique with some history." After seeing an article on Cerro Gordo being for sale, he decided the mining town was what he was looking for and moved quickly. The town was listed in early June, meaning it was only on the market for several weeks before the group's offer was accepted.

Besides keeping Cerro Gordo open to the public and available for tours, the group plans to invest in improving some aspects of the site, and making improvements to some of the buildings, "to make things a bit more comfortable," noted Rasmuson. Underwood said the besides maintaining the historic character of Cerro Gordo, the group wants to invest in numerous upgrades and amenities that will allow more people to enjoy the site. "They have a great business plan," Rasmuson said.

Several of the town's 22 remaining buildings have been restored over the years, including The American Hotel with bar and dinning room, the church, the general store, and a bunkhouse. For a time, the hotel served as a bed and breakfast. Underwood said the first move would be to open the restored bunkhouse for visitors. He added that the hotel and its bar, dining room and pianos will be a focal point of the group's investments in Cerro Gordo.

Long-term, the town and its buildings could be used as the site for weekend escapes, festivals, photo shoots, and writing retreats, Underwood said. No timeline was given for the improvements or other developments.

Cerro Gordo played an outsize role in the history of Inyo County and Los Angeles.

In the 1860s, Mexican miners named the site Cerro Gordo, which means Fat Hill. By the 1870s, silver and lead ore was processed and hauled down the treacherously steep "Yellow Grade" road in huge freight wagons, and eventually 275 miles to Los Angeles. He eventually hauled 20 tons of ore a month to Los Angeles. The silver shipments provided a vital cash boost to the small city.

The 1880s also saw the short-lived "steamship era" on the Owens Lake, featuring the Molly Stevens and the Bessie Brady. The Cottonwood Sawmill and charcoal kilns, on the west side of the lake, were built to supply wood and charcoal to Cerro Gordo.

By the 1870s, the mines were playing out and eventually shut down. Mining was revived in the early 1900s, when the old ore piles were processed and produced zinc. An aerial tram was built to haul the ore to Keeler. That boom was short-lived, however, and by the 1920s, mining activity pretty much stopped.

The ghost town era came to an end in 1985 when Jody Stewart, who bought the town and mine from relatives, and Mike Patterson started stabilizing and restoring the buildings.

Cerro Gordo, circa 1910, showing a team of mules hauling freight and the aerial tram that was installed to move ore from the mines down to the valley floor.

Eastern California Museum photo

Cerro Gordo sold!

New owners to improve ghost town

By Jon Klusmire 2018

Eastern California Museum photos

The view from above Cerro Gordo, looking down on Owens Lake, circa 1910.

The Eastern Sierra has taken its rightful place among the world's favorite climbing destinations – Chamonix, France; Yosemite, California; The Tetons in Wyoming; even Patagonia in South America. So, why the draw? What's so great about the Eastern Sierra for climbing?

When the Cerro Gordo mining town was put up for sale in June, the novelty of selling an entire town that reeked of Western history generated huge waves of publicity from national and international media.

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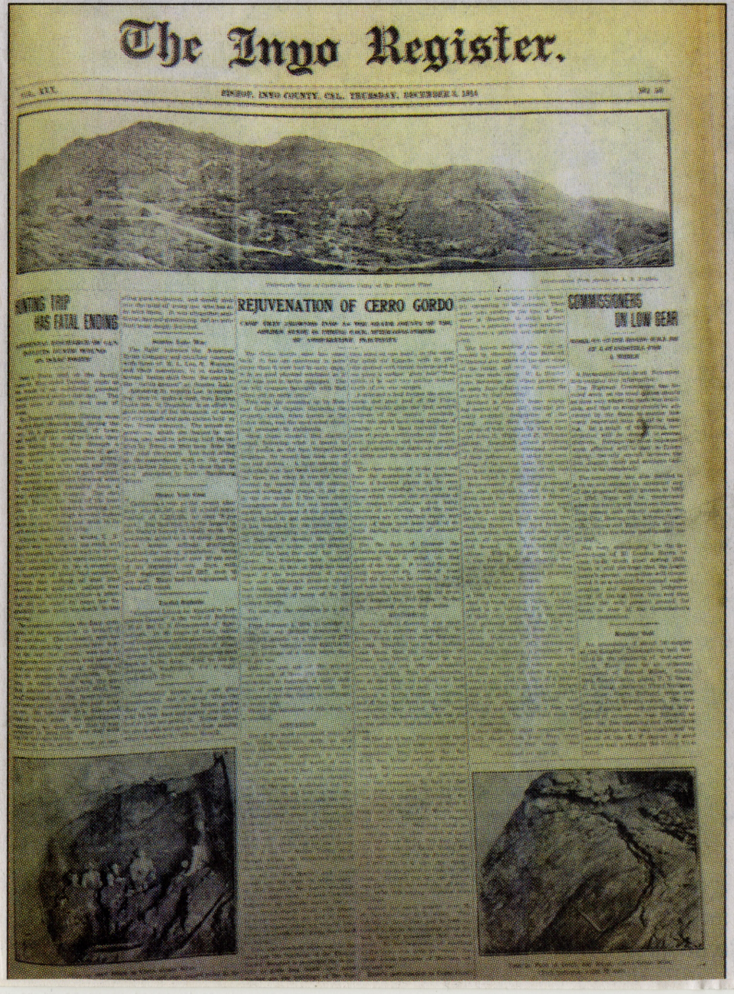

The Inyo Register.

HUNTING TRIP HAS FATAL ENDING

REJUVENATION OF CERRO GORDO

COMMISSIONERS ON LOW GEAR

The Thursday, Dec. 3, 1914 issue of The Inyo Register trumpets the "Rejuvenation of Cerro Gordo," proclaiming: "Camp that crowned Inyo as the silver county of the Golden State is coming back, after long period of comparative inactivity."

File photo

Cerro Gordo remains a favorite destination for field trips.

In a nice twist, Ramsuson confirmed the sale of Cerro Gordo, which was called a Ghost Town in many media stories, closed on Friday the 13th.

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Cerro Gordo played an outsize role in the history of Inyo County and Los Angeles.

In the 1860s, Mexican miners named the site Cerro Gordo, which means Fat Hill. By the 1870s, silver and lead ore was processed and hauled down the treacherously steep "Yellow Grade" road in huge freight wagons, and eventually 275 miles to Los Angeles. He eventually hauled 20 tons of ore a month to Los Angeles. The silver shipments provided a vital cash boost to the small city.

The 1880s also saw the short-lived "steamship era" on the Owens Lake, featuring the Molly Stevens and the Bessie Brady. The Cottonwood Sawmill and charcoal kilns, on the west side of the lake, were built to supply wood and charcoal to Cerro Gordo.

By the 1870s, the mines were playing out and eventually shut down. Mining was revived in the early 1900s, when the old ore piles were processed and produced zinc. An aerial tram was built to haul the ore to Keeler. That boom was short-lived, however, and by the 1920s, mining activity pretty much stopped.

The ghost town era came to an end in 1985 when Jody Stewart, who bought the town and mine from relatives, and Mike Patterson started stabilizing and restoring the buildings.

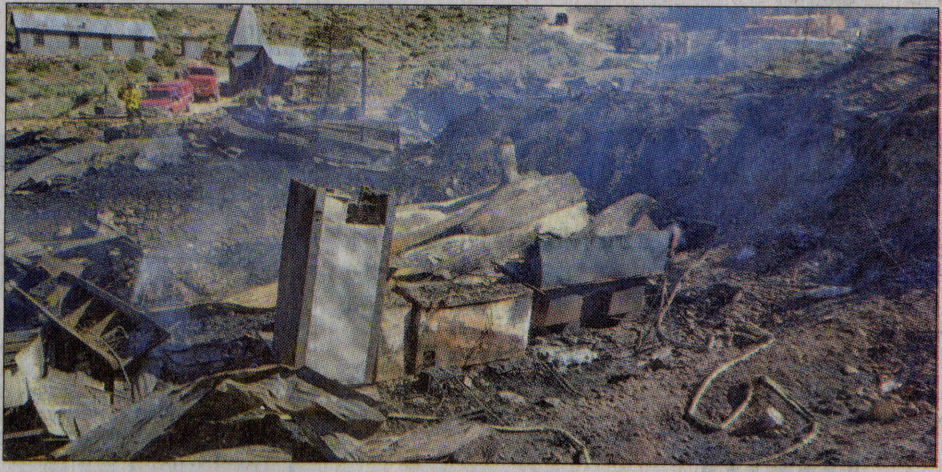
Professional Services

The view from above Cerro Gordo, looking down on Owens Lake, circa 1910.

Eastern California Museum photo

TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2020 | INYOREGISTER.COM | SERVING THE EASTERN SIERRA AND BEYOND SINCE 1870 | 75¢

Cerro Gordo fire



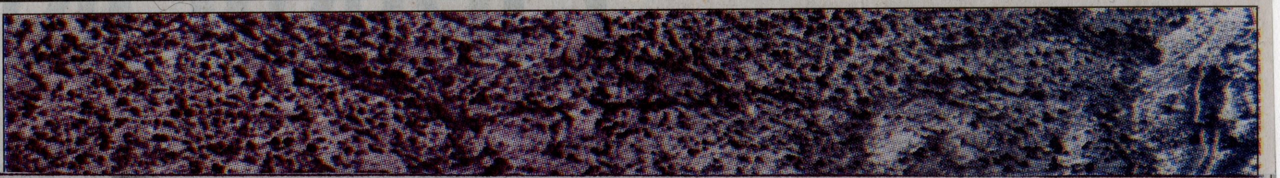
Multiple structures were damaged from a fire that struck the Cerro Gordo ghost town early Monday morning, as indicated by photos obtained from the Olancha-Cartago Fire Department. Specifics regarding the blaze, however, were still not available as of press time Monday. The property, including 22 buildings, was recently purchased by a group of investors for $1.4 million who planned on making improvements at the site.

Photos courtesy of the Olancha-Cartago Fire Department

Top: Ashes are all that's left of the historic American Hotel after a devastating fire on June 15, which also claimed two other nearby buildings. Below: The two-story, wooden American Hotel in Cerro Gordo, right, and the Crapo House, both located below the Gordon Mansion, which barely escaped the flames.

Above photo credit Olancha Cartago Volunteer Fire Department, below photo courtesy Terri Geissinger

6-20-2020



Cerro Gordo owners vow to rebuild the American Hotel

Supporters kindle hope for Inyo county treasure destroyed by fire

6-20-2020

By Jon Klusmire
Register Correspondent

A historic comeback is in the works in Cerro Gordo.

The owners of Inyo County's first and most famous boom town recently stated they want to rebuild the historic American Hotel after the landmark burned down on June 15. And they are asking for the public to contribute to the ambitious effort to build a modern replica of the hotel that could become the centerpiece for yet another round of good times on the "Fat Hill."

"This historic town is our love. We've been in the process of restoring it to allow more people to experience the natural beauty and history of Cerro Gordo. With your help, we can still make this a reality, even through the tragedy," stated the town's owners on a GoFundMe page seeking $500,000 in donations to rebuild the hotel.

Donations will be sent to the non-profit Friends of Cerro Gordo. During the fundraising effort's first three days, about $20,000 had been raised.

Cerro Gordo, located in the hills east of Lone Pine above Owens Lake, was established in 1865 and quickly became California's largest silver producer. Those early years saw the development of a freight-wagon route to carry the ore to the little town of Los Angeles. Famed Owens Lake steamers the Bessie Brady and the Molly Stevens carried the town's bullion. Charcoal kilns that helped fuel the camp's stamp mills still stand on the west side of Owens Lake.

The two-story, wooden American Hotel was built in 1871 and witnessed the mining town's ups and downs. Those included Cerro Gordo's early days

See CERRO GORDO ▶ Page 3

CERRO GORDO

Continued from front page

as a rip-roaring, rough and tumble silver camp filled with saloons, "dance halls," and miners, but no schools or churches. After silver prices tumbled, Cerro Gordo came back to life before WW I to produce lead, which was hauled to the Keeler railhead via a tram. That boom was short-lived and the town and mine were mostly abandoned.

A new era started when Mike Patterson bought the town in 1985 and, with wife Jodie, restored the American Hotel and other buildings and opened the town for visitors, who came to explore and enjoy a "living ghost town."

The current ownership group, headed by Brent Underwood and John Bier, paid an eye-popping $1.4 million for the 300-acre site and its 22 buildings in July of 2018.

The owners spelled out the details of the fire and their plans going forward on the GoFundMe site:

"Devastating doesn't reflect all the hurt we're feeling up here on the mountain. It's even difficult to write this through many tears. It's been an extremely emotional time and we're not quite sure the words, but here we are. We need help.

"Our goal has always been to share Cerro Gordo with you all. To let everyone experience the beauty and history that this town holds. We've been working around the clock the past months trying to get it ready. The American Hotel was the crown jewel of Cerro Gordo. And now it's gone.

"The fire also claimed the Crapo House and the Ice House, which neighbored the American Hotel. The flames came within five feet of the Gordon Mansion but using every drop of water in town we were able to hold back the fire until the fire department could arrive.

"The cause of the fire is unknown. The common assessment right now is old electrical wiring and paper thin, dry wood. We don't yet know.

"What we do know is that we need help. We really need help. In a time where there are so many larger causes, we know an old building might not be top of list to assist, but this town means a lot to a lot of people and we were hoping a lot of people can help bring it back to life.

"We have the original plans and blueprints for the hotel and what we are planning on doing with the raised funds is make it better than ever, bring it back to a version of the glory days. No, it won't be original wood, but it will be the original design and up to modern code, so people can actually stay in the American Hotel and cook and eat meals at the Saloon.

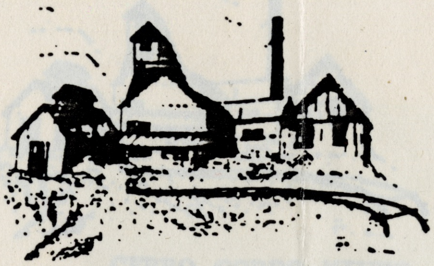
"Your support, big or small, means the world to us and we hope one day to host you back at the American Hotel."

Cerro Gordo's Brent Underwood is the latest great Death Valley 'prospector'

Top: Ashes are all that's left of the historic American Hotel after a devastating fire on June 15, which also claimed two other nearby buildings. Below: The two-story, wooden American Hotel in Cerro Gordo, right, and the Crapo House, both located below the Gordon Mansion, which barely escaped the flames.

Above photo credit Olancha Cartago Volunteer Fire Department, below photo courtesy Terri Geissinger

CERRO GORDO MINES



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1996

CERRO GORDO MINES
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CERRO GORDO FREIGHTING COMPANY PRESENT!

The famous old **CERRO GORDO GHOST TOWNSITE** is now available BY RESERVATION! You and your group can now enjoy the 1868 Townsite; including the 1871 American Hotel, the fully restored 1904 Bunkhouse (accomodates up to 14), the 1868 Belshaw House (accomodates up to 5). You and your group will enjoy colorful history and artifacts in Beaudry's General Store (now a museum complete with viewing deck), an assay office, the 1877 Hoist Works, and numerous other remaining structures.

The TOWNSITE is perfect for **PHOTOGRAPHY CLUBS AND WORKSHOPS!** Unlike Bodie, Cerro Gordo is privately owned and you set your own shooting schedule, according to the light and not the clock! The photo opportunities are too numerous to mention. The views are truly spectacular. You can see majestic Mt. Whitney, the Sierras reflected on the Owen's Lake playa, vibrant sunsets and beautiful pink and gold sunrises.

The TOWNSITE, closed to collectors for nearly 2 decades, is also the perfect locale for **ROCK AND MINERAL COLLECTORS**. The site features several hundred thousand tons of dump materials from the main mine workings. (Those old workings consisted of seven levels--approximately 37 miles of tunnels.)

CERRO GORDO is world reknown for:

> Anglesite, anhydrite, argentite, atacamite, aurichalcite, azurite, barite, bindheimite, bouronite, calcite, caledonite, cermrgyrite, cerussite, ceruantite, chrysocolla, dufrenoysite, fluorite, galena, geothite, greenockite, hemimorphite, hollosite, hydrozincite, jamesonite, leadhillite, limonite, linerite, liroconite, malachite, mimetite, plumbpgumite, pyrite, quartz, silver, smithsonite, sphalerite, stibnite, stromeyerite, tetrahedrite, tetrajymite, willemite, and wulfenite.

We are negotiating with the most well known professional minerologists for a planned lecture series on specimen collecting; as well as famous specimen photographers. Seminars will include catered meals and ample opportunities for you and your group to collect from the old dumps.

You and your group can be comfortably accomodated on site. However, if you require a little less "ambiance" and more conventional creature comforts, the picturesque little town of Lone Pine, nestled at the foot of the Sierras, is only 20 miles away.

For further information, rates, and a customized itinerary, please call:

619-876-4154 or 619-876-5871

Article and photographs by Michael Dawson

Seems Like Old Times

The 19th-century town of Cerro Gordo (left, an interior of a mining company building, and below), parts of which are now being restored, boasts magnificent views of the Owens Lake Bed.

Taking a break from today on a trip around the Owens Valley.

IN THE FAST-PACED world of the late 20th century, I am a bit out of place. In my professional life as an antiquarian bookseller, I spend most of my time living in the past. At parties, I no longer try to explain what I do for a living. After one social introduction, I politely listened to my new acquaintance elaborate on the beauty and diversity of his tropical fish collection. He thought I sold *aquarium* books.

When you spend a lot of time with old books, you tend to develop a sense of a past that often seems more appealing than the world of today. One of my passions is California history, particularly the history of the Eastern Sierra and the Owens Valley. I like to pull out of the steady stream of motorists heading up Highway 395 to Mammoth or June Lake and, for several days at a time, explore the valley's desolate corners and consider its past.

I realize this might not be everyone's idea of fun. But consider these maxims and see if there isn't a history buff lying dormant within you.

You know you're a history buff when . . . you have a fondness for visiting places where the only thing left is history.
While the desert is unmerciful to remnants of human habitation, many artifacts remain from the days of the silver miners who toiled in the Owens Valley region more than 100 years ago. The Inyo mountain range, which rises majestically from the eastern shore of what is now the Owens Lake Bed, held several rich deposits of silver discovered in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Even before Los Angeles turned Owens Valley water into gold, these strikes were crucial to the city's economic development.

Located approximately 200 miles north of Los Angeles, Owens Lake was fed by mountain streams that tumbled into the Owens River from the heights of the Eastern Sierra north of the town of Bishop. When the Los Angeles Aqueduct was completed in 1913, the flow of water into Owens Lake was severely restricted, then cut altogether. By the 1930s the lake was completely dry.

From 1872 to 1883, two steamships—the *Bessie Brady* and the *Mollie Stevens*—navigated these now-vanished waters. The little hamlet of Cartago (quite easily missed if you don't look closely at road signs) was the western terminus of the steamship service; a small plaque commemorates the former port. Looking out from Cartago across the great dusty expanse of the Owens Lake Bed toward the northeastern port of Swansea, it's hard now to picture the ships, smokestacks coughing and whistles blowing. Local legend has it that the *Bessie Brady* sank without a trace in the middle of the lake while carrying a full load of silver bullion. Nine years ago, a treasure hunter spent $70,000 trying to locate the vessel, but nothing was ever found.

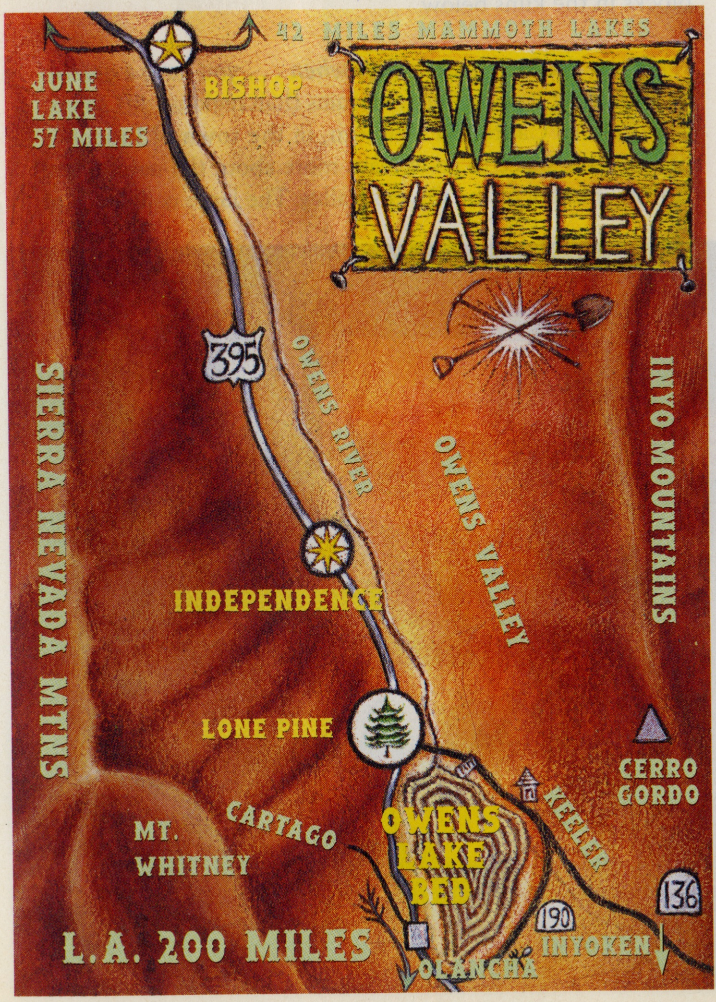
Another strange remnant from the days of silver mining, the Cottonwood charcoal kilns are located about six miles north of Cartago and about a quarter mile east of Highway 395 down a well-graded dirt road. (The *Mollie Stevens* cruised from Cartago to the kilns.) These two large beehive structures were built in 1877 by Colonel Sherman Stevens to produce charcoal to fire smelters in the mining towns of Cerro Gordo and Darwin. Stevens had to construct his kilns so far from the furnaces because all the wood near the mining towns had already been used. On the steep slopes of the Eastern Sierra, one can still see the road and trails where workers traveled to cut down the trees that were turned into charcoal blocks in the kilns below.

You know you're a history buff when . . . you have a greater interest in regional history museums than regional gift shops.
The Eastern California Museum, in the town of Independence, is the place to go to learn more about the natural and cultural history of the Owens Valley. The large collection of

Stop off at the Eastern California Museum (left) in Independence, and see the sights in Keeler (right).

Paiute and Shoshone baskets is especially interesting, and there are rare photographs showing the farming and ranching communities of the 19th and early 20th centuries—communities that began to unravel when the Los Angeles Aqueduct drained most of the water from the valley. Of special note is a detailed display chronicling the history of the Manzanar Relocation Center, constructed in the Owens Valley during World War II to house Japanese Americans forcibly removed from their homes in California, Oregon, and Washington. Museum director Bill Michael, or one of his knowledgeable staff, will answer any of your questions. A well-stocked bookstore offers a variety of fiction and nonfiction titles covering the valley's natural and human history.

For the history buff who travels with children, the exhibits in the museum's backyard can double as a playground. There are antique wagons and mining tools deposited in neat rows as if by some flying saucer trawling the desert for scrap with a giant magnet, as well as a number of transplanted and reconstructed buildings, including a Paiute dwelling and a variety of wood structures that accurately convey the look and feel of a Western town of the mid-19th century.



You know you're a history buff when . . . you get excited about abandoned railroad stations.

One mile north of the town of Lone Pine, the old Southern Pacific railroad depot is a majestic yellow-and-brown building shadowed by Mount Whitney to the west and the Inyo Mountains to the east. Southern Pacific ran trains into Lone Pine as late as 1970 but afterward let the abandoned building fall into disrepair. Fortunately for railroad enthusiasts and admirers of old architecture, the Lone Pine Station found a savior in local resident Rod Keener, who leased the building from Southern Pacific and began to restore it. When enough work had been completed to make the building habitable, Keener moved in with his family. He welcomes visitors and will guide them through the premises, including the ticket office and waiting room, now a living room and dining area. But, because this is a private home, advance notice is appreciated.

The lovely railroad station in Keeler, on the eastern shore of Owens Lake, is now a private residence as well. Founded in 1883, Keeler was the southern terminus for the narrow-gauge Carson & Colorado Railroad, which ran north to Mound House, Nevada. Although the tracks have long since been removed, the depot still stands, its weathered boards glowing a warm purple in the late afternoon light. A strange blend of neatly tended homes and abandoned buildings, Keeler is a community frozen in time. The faded signs on the side of the Sierra Talc Company are still visible. Rusted gasoline pumps stand guard in front of a service station that has been transformed into a small but comfortable home.

You know you're a history buff when . . . you like to travel on dirt roads in search of towns that looked better a hundred years ago than they do today.

The eastern shore of Owens Lake is dotted with abandoned towns that flourished during several mining booms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Not much is left of the

famous
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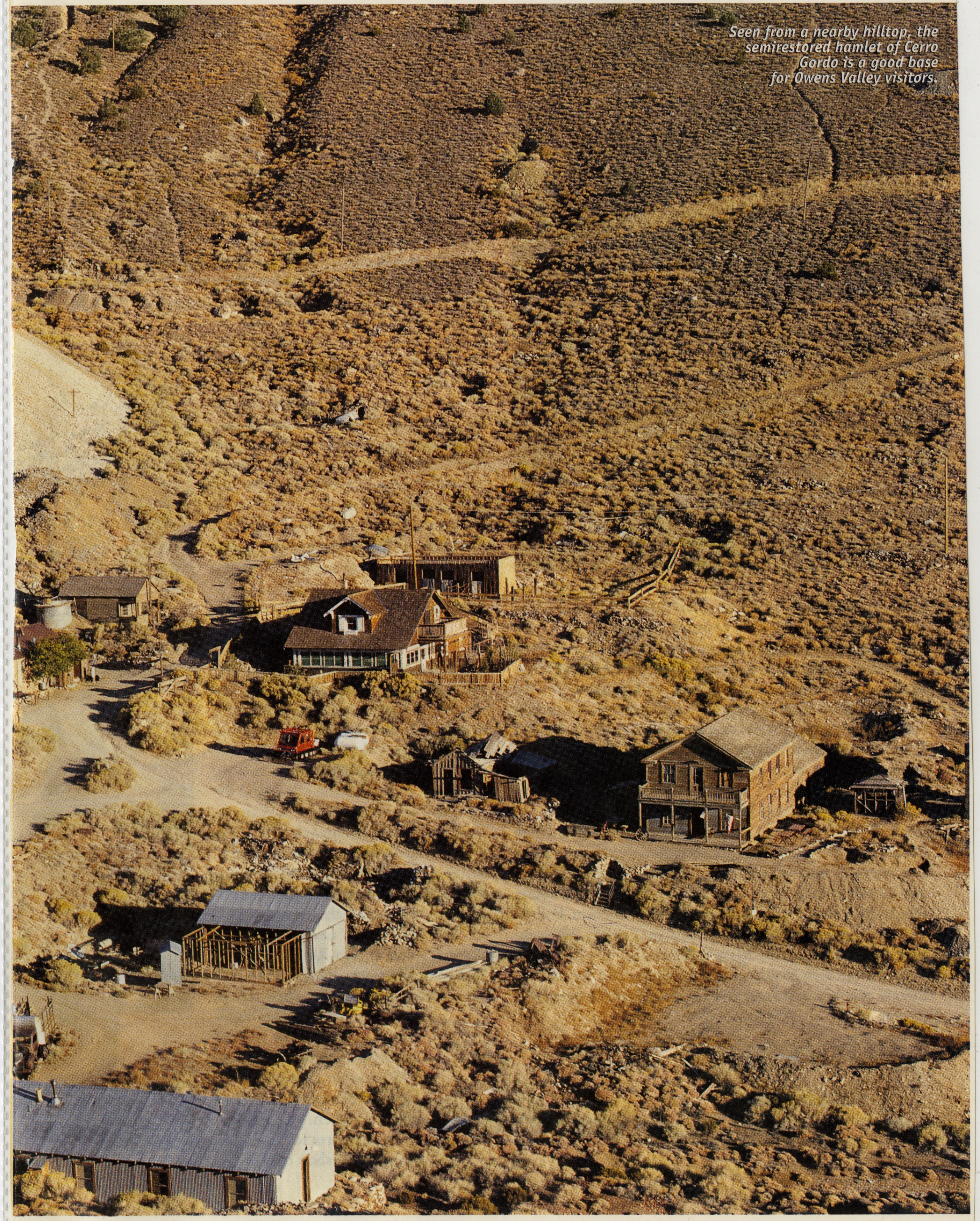


Seen from a nearby hilltop, the semirestored hamlet of Cerro Gordo is a good base for Owens Valley visitors.

views of the Owens Valley and a huge portion of the Eastern Sierra. Several years ago, Stewart began to restore the buildings—five have been finished to date—and she opened a rustic bed-and-breakfast that has become a favorite location for photography workshops and mineral symposiums.

The lodgings, which Stewart describes as "primitive but comfortable," can accommodate 15; guests can bring food, or, for an additional charge, catered meals are provided. There are a number of trails for hiking and mountain biking as well as quiet places to sit back with a good book or enjoy the scenery. Horseback rides can be arranged from Swansea up to Cerro Gordo; they take six hours, including a lunch break.

Stewart has also begun to restore the 1871 American Hotel and has furnished several of the rooms with antique furniture. "What we are doing here is restorative reuse," says Stewart. "We try to put buildings into service, and then we take all the money we make and generate it back into keeping the restoration alive. There is so much to be done."

town of Swansea, but the site offers one of the most beautiful vistas across the salty crust of Owens Lake. On the west side of the highway, a small tower of blackened rock is the last remaining section of a blast furnace that made silver bullion from the unprocessed ore brought down the mountain from Cerro Gordo. A stroll down the path that runs by the furnace leads to a small outcropping of sand dunes that roll gently down to the lake bed. Across the lake to the west, the peaks of the Eastern Sierra reach upward into a deep-blue sky.

A drive up the steep slopes of the Inyo range leads to the isolated town of Cerro Gordo, founded in the 1860s when Pablo Flores and several other miners discovered a rich silver vein near the top of a high mountain pass. The town's owner and caretaker, Jody Stewart, lives in the L.D. Gordon house, which she restored with her partner, Mike Patterson. Built in 1904 during the second mining boom of the early 20th century, the Gordon House has a breathtaking view down the slopes of the Inyo Mountains to the shores of Owens Lake. Indeed, the entire town of Cerro Gordo boasts magnificent

An Owens Lake vacation is a history buff's dream.

You know you're a history buff when . . .
you like to stop at restaurants that haven't been remodeled in 40 years.
Along the shores of Owens Lake are several restaurants that beckon to the history buff. Fortunately for the buff's friends and relatives, the quality of the food will satisfy the more logical priorities. I always look forward to visiting the Ranch House Cafe in Olancha, a little town on the southwest lakeshore. Nestled beneath the branches of several large cottonwood trees, the café serves delicious hamburgers and solid sandwiches, and has been in continuous operation since at least the 1930s.

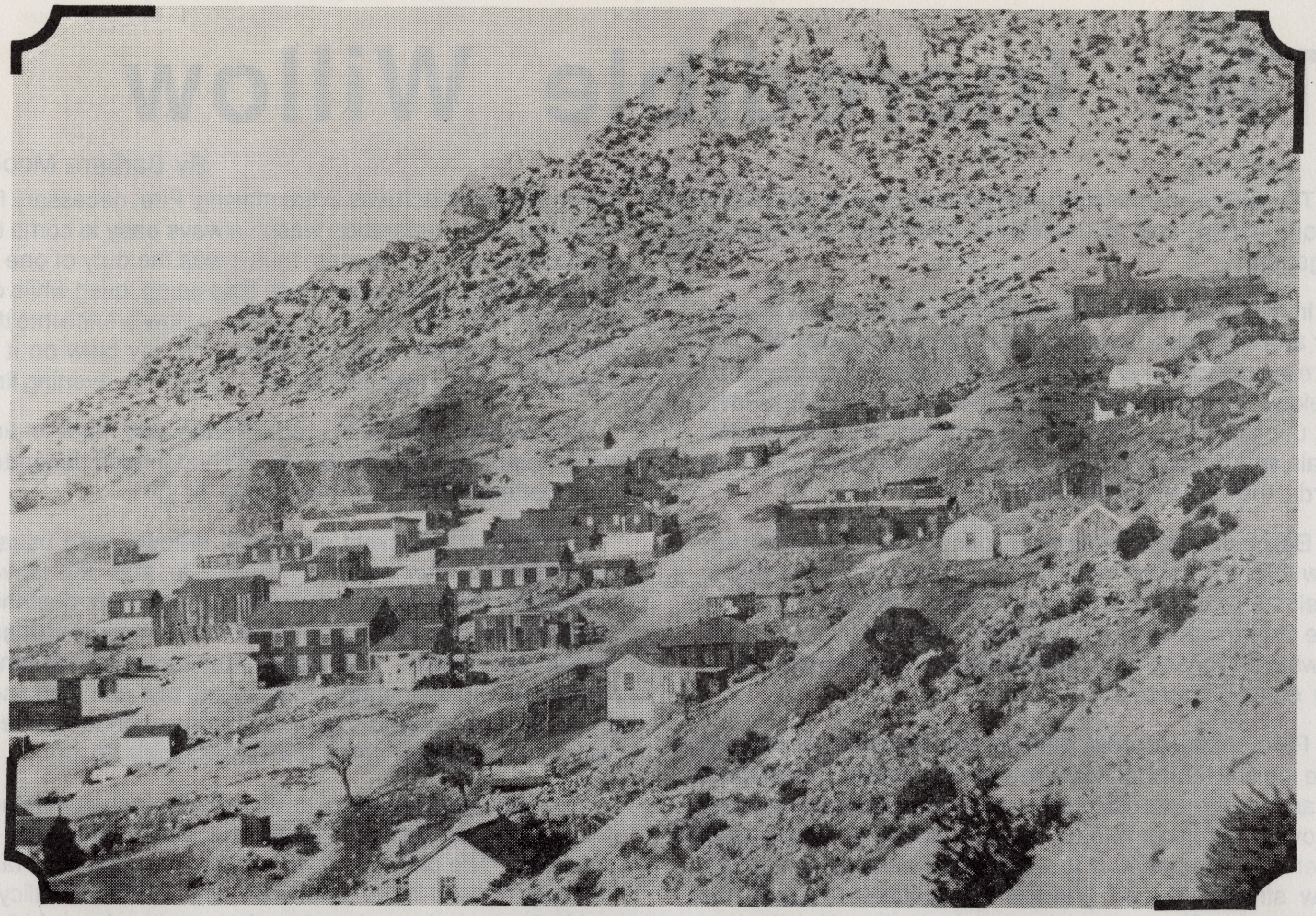
The elaborate neon facade of Margie's Merry-Go-Round Dinner House, in the town of Lone Pine, will stop history buffs dead in their tracks. Inside this funny circular building, decorated in the style of an elegant supper club of the 1950s, owner Don Burkhardt serves a pleasant variety of steak, chicken, and fish entrées that provide a respite from coffee shop cuisine.

The magnetic lure of vintage machinery: detail of the train station at Lone Pine (left), and exterior exhibits at the Eastern California Museum (below).

Perhaps the most exotic eatery is located a bit farther south in the town of Inyokern. The Two Sisters Restaurant was founded by sisters Sally and Tally, who were soon joined by a third sister, Jere Lee—locals used to call the spot "The Two Sisters Plus One." I like to dine on the outdoor patio, near the fountain decorated with abalone shells and miniature figurines; big parties sometimes occupy the Tiki Room. All three sisters are former entertainers, and while Tally and Jere Lee have retired from the business, 90-year-old Sally can occasionally be found "sitting in" at the big electric organ in the main dining room.

You know you're a history buff when . . . you come home from a trip with dirt in your shoes instead of new clothes in your suitcase.

An Owens Lake vacation is a history buff's dream, an itinerary of out-of-the-way places that provide ample opportunities for leisurely walks, quiet spots for picnics, and perhaps a museum or two—all in places that are scattered with clues to the past. If you've grown tired of trips filled with guided tours and factory outlet stores, a history buff's vacation just may be for you. W



This historic photo was taken prior to the 1870's, as evidenced by the building on the upper right which burned then. The American Hotel is the large building, lower left.

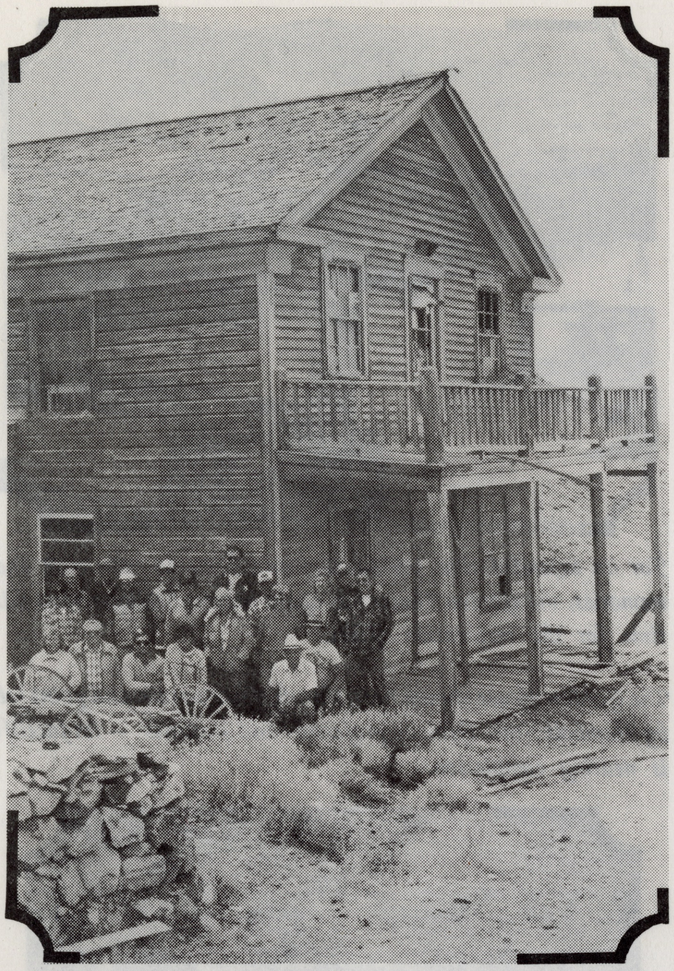
CERRO GORDO

History Comes to Life

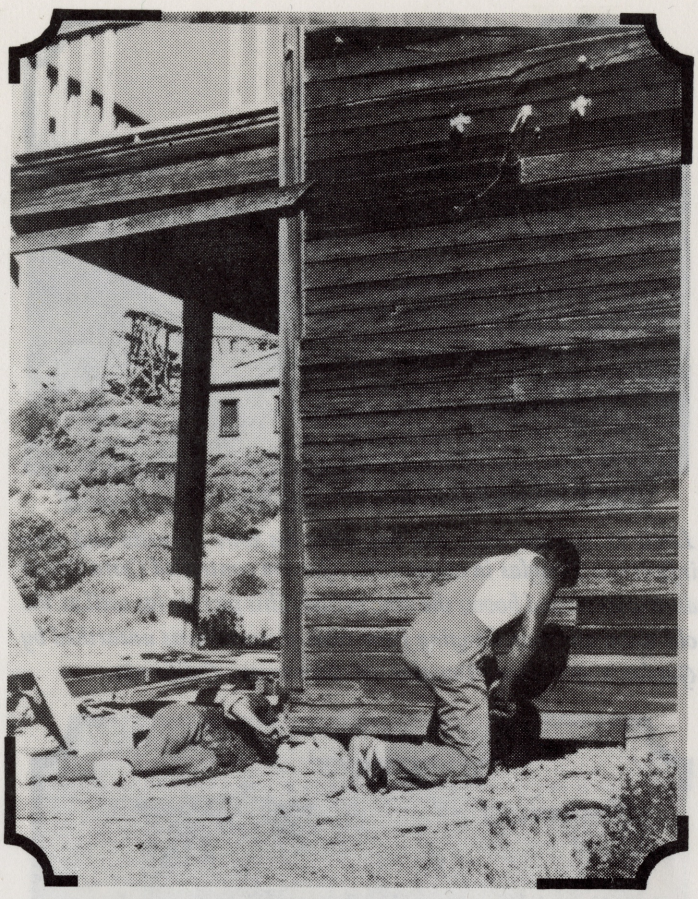
Cerro Gordo (Fat Mill) was also known as Bullion Hill. This "Comstock" to Los Angeles was discovered by Pablo Flores and a group of Mexican prospectors around 1865. By 1871 Mortimer Belshaw smelter had the highest output of any in the nation. Remi Nadeau's mule teams hauling bullion and supplies numbered somewhere around 1300 animals. The steamers, Bessie Brady and Molly Stevens plied the then navigable waters of the Owens Lake, their hulls filled with bullion, charcoal, equipment and settlers.

Cerro Gordo's population hovered around 2,000 during the boom years; its peak may have reached 4,800 souls in a multinational blend. At one time the mining district had more votes than Bishop. Soldiers from old Camp Independence were often called to keep the peace as well as celebrate the town's good fortune. The Hoist House, in the upper right hand corner of the photo, accesses the largest silver mine workings in California, which of unraveled would nearly reach from Lone Pine to Big Pine, roughly 37 miles.

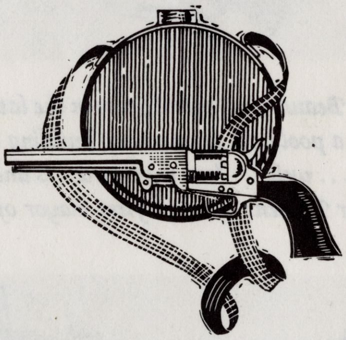
Now in 1987, after 122 years, two major and several minor boom periods, Cerro Gordo has been ravaged by time and weather. A large part of the damage has been done by those seeking ghost town relics and cheap building materials. By far the most senseless have been those who burn old buildings in their campfires.



Many visitors wonder what became of the Hotel Register? . . . Whose boots wore out the floor? . . . Who owned the business? . . . What famous or infamous characters checked in and participated in the Boom Town excitement. The friendly folks shown here are members of the Back Road Explorers Sanction Committee, L.A. Chapter of the Sierra Club. They have generously offered their time to assist in the restoration effort.



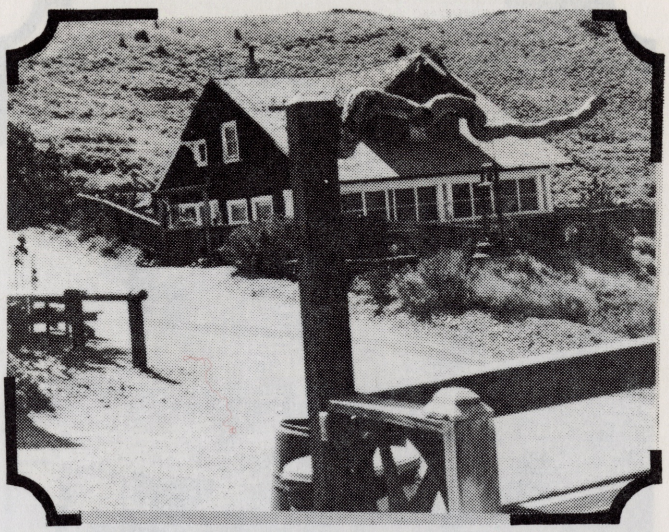
The American Hotel was built in 1871 and remodeled in 1923. Its foundation was undermined during the 1984 flash flooding that nearly buried Keeler. Now, in 1987, Jigger Nelson and his son Rick, of Big Pine, assist in propping up one corner.



The old Livery Stable, as shown here filled with rubble and rubbish, illustrates the magnitude of the "Histo-Reclamy" being undertaken. The irrepressable Geargrinders Four-wheel Drive Club of Ridgecrest deserves silver and gold medals for having tackled the short straw jobs of the project. One volunteer shown here in contemplation while the club spent a sub-freezing and blustery Valentines weekend sorting artifacts from trash and hauling truck loads to the dump. Wonder what he's thinking?

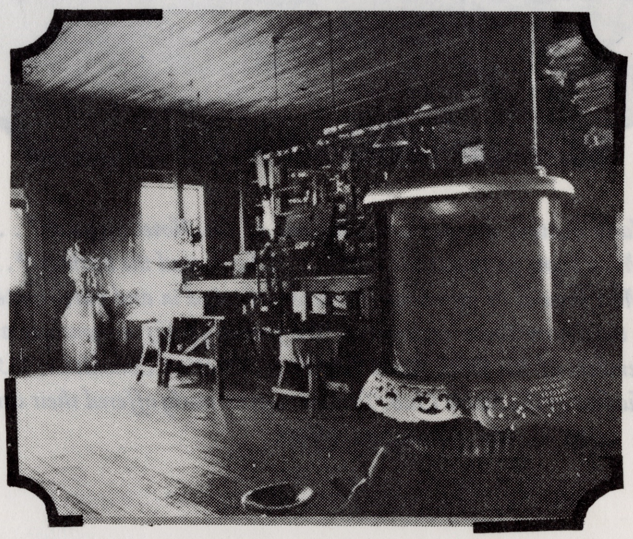
Louis D. Gordon built this house for his wife Cornelia and their infant son Douglas in about 1908. Gordon controlled Cerro Gordo during its second boom; the zinc period. This picture (as well as the old town and man hanging from tram pictures) was unearthed by Gordon's grandson Douglas of Montrose, California.

Possibly Victor Beaudry's General Store in the late 1800s, it served in the 1920s as a pool hall, later a shop building and then storage for all kinds of . . . well . . . "one man's trash is another's treasure." Victor's brother Prudent was the first mayor of Los Angeles in 1881.



For an extended time windowless and home to only mice and memories, the Gordon House has again become headquarters; this time for the restoration effort.

The Gordon House shown here, shortly after a stain and paint job by Humbolt State Geology professors and students — its facelift is nearing completion.



After months of cleaning mouse nests and removing 50 year's accumulated dust, the Cerro Gordo General Store displays artifacts from the old mining district. The tide is turning. Treasures which had been lost or were hauled away are finding their way home. Many thanks are due to those who express their desire to help preserve on-site evidence of this rapidly disappearing period.

Some ardent supporters from the Maturango Museum visited Cerro Gordo this fall. This was their second annual visit to the ghost camp. Enthusiastic about the progress restoration work is showing, their third visit is planned for the coming spring.

Intensive exploration for new mineralization has led Asamera Minerals to re-open old mine workings as well as chart new potentials in the famous mining district. Inyo County pioneer Pat Ready Esq. had partial interest in the tunnel shown.

Courteney Peddle, San Francisco Examiner Editor, and his friend Pam Magnuson assist in the retrieval of old ore buckets from Cerro Gordo's "Montgomery Tram."

Sensitive to the historical environment, the mining company cheerfully cooperates in the restoration. Their expertise in identification of old mining equipment and techniques so familiar to early Cerro Gordo residents is invaluable.

Each year thousands of people from all over the world visit Cerro Gordo. They've read about it in a book, had a relative who worked there or simply turned up a dirt road to escape the city.

Once the Belshaw-Yellow Grade Road was a toll road. Now it is a county road. The climb is 5,000 feet in 7.5 miles.

As a mining district, Cerro Gordo's future is predictable. As in the past, changing national economies and technological advances affect its reawakening.

As a privately owned Ghost Town, its future is in the adroit hands of owner Jody Stewart. As an Inyo County pioneer daughter, she seems driven to save this remote camp as an instructive tool and grand example of our living history. Visitors are welcomed, but should bring water; a 4-wheel drive vehicle is needed to reach the mine. For further information, call (619) 876-4154 or (619) 876-5871.

Photographs by Stephanie Diani for The New York Times

The ghost town of Cerro Gordo, Calif., above, is owned by Mike Patterson, right, who has rebuilt it with painstaking care.

CERRO GORDO Four-wheel drive is highly recommended for the drive up the steep dirt road from Highway 136. Mike Patterson, who owns the town, does not take walk-in visitors. Call him at 760-876-5030 for reservations and for road conditions before going up (the road isn't plowed in winter). For more information, visit www.cerrogordo.us. The bunk house ($300 a night) sleeps 12. The restored Belshaw House ($150 a night) sleeps four and has a kitchen and a bathroom. Day visitors can come for a tour of the town and its museum ($5 a person).

OVER

New York Times 3-19-06

By FINN-OLAF JONES

IN the moonlight 8,200 feet up on the ridgeline of the Inyo Mountains, one can make out the remains of a dozen miners' shacks slung across a ravine almost eight miles up a steep dirt road twisting up from the desert plains of Owens Valley.

It has been half a century since anyone toiled in the creaky wooden mining works that hover above the ruins like ghost steeples. But inside the Belshaw House, a rickety Victorian cottage built by a mine owner in 1868, the perfect silence of the desert is broken by a gentle whirring sound that seems so incongruous out here that you would almost imagine it was from the central dynamo of the cosmos: it's the sound of a refrigerator and a water heater.

Although the original inhabitants could only have dreamed of such comforts, for $150 and a four-hour drive from Los Angeles, this fully modernized shack, in Cerro Gordo, Calif., with its two restored Victorian bedrooms, is yours for the night.

The desert wilderness around Death Valley is speckled with abandoned mining and railroad towns, some of which are owned by inventive and often colorful individuals who have made their own destinies under the sun. These individuals have converted what were once decrepit and isolated buildings into Meccas for desert aficionados.

"At its peak, Cerro Gordo had 4,800 people living here, along with five hotels, seven saloons, and two bordellos," said Mike Patterson, a wind-energy entrepreneur whose late wife, Jody, was a partner in the Cerro Gordo mines and who has combined enough claims to own the town outright. "There are probably about 600 of them who are still here in the cemetery on top of the hill."

Since 1985, Mr. Patterson has lived in a restored two-story Victorian miner's home, slowly rebuilding the collapsed shacks and creaky houses with a growing group of weekend volunteers. "Usually, when people come here for a second or third time, they bring work gloves," Mr. Patterson said.

Their effort has been a task akin to building the pyramids, but the results are stunning; the faucets now work in one of the most arid and isolated spots on the planet thanks to an ingenious system of pipes that connects to a spring at the bottom of an old mine shaft. Mr. Patterson also strung his own lines to bring in electricity.

The old general store in Cerro Gordo (which means Fat Hill in Spanish) has been turned into a ramshackle museum, where ancient mining tools, rusty pistols, a sun-bleached wooden tombstone and other artifacts from the pioneers are displayed. On one shelf sits a row of empty English beer and French Champagne bottles, many over a century old.

"Cerro Gordo used to be a very rich town," Mr. Patterson said. "It was the 'Comstock' to Los Angeles. It was only because it got so expensive to mine here in the 1950's and 60's that it was abandoned."

Apart from the Belshaw House, with its shower, full kitchen and two Victorian bedrooms, visitors can also stay in the Bunkhouse, which sleeps 12, but has more authentic toilet facilities in the form of an outhouse, which Mr. Patterson noted was 29 paces away — "unless it's cold or there's an urgency."

"One woman wrote me a nice thank-you letter where she complimented me for supplying talcum powder in the outhouse," Mr. Patterson said. "I finally figured out she was referring to the lime that you're supposed to throw into the pit."

Farther down the hill is the American Hotel, a two-story building with a rickety porch and terrace, where Mr. Patterson and his crew will cater larger parties in a modern restaurant kitchen they've installed. "We'll serve you anything you want with advance planning, as long as it's meat and potatoes," said Mr. Patterson.

The New York Times

Cerro Gordo field trip

The field trip to the silver mining camp of Cerro Gordo, hosted by the Friends of the Eastern California Museum, will include a guided tour by the town's caretaker.

Photo submitted

Journey to silver mining camp promises to be an all-day event

Register Staff

2015

The Friends of the Eastern California Museum is pleased to announce a field trip to the silver mining camp of Cerro Gordo.

The trip will include a guided tour by the town's caretaker. High-clearance vehicles are suggested though the road has recently been put in good shape by the Inyo County Road Department and is passable to most passenger cars with drivers experienced in dirt road mountain driving.

The trip is limited to 30 people and the cost is $20 for FECM members and $25 for non-members.

People wishing to take the trip must sign up in advance and may do so by calling the museum at (760) 878-0258. Attendees will meet at 9 a.m. Nov. 7 at the Interagency Visitor Center south of Lone Pine at the intersection of Highway 395 and state route 136.

Ride sharing from the visitor center is strongly recommended and people should take plenty of water and a lunch for what should be an all-day event.

A safe trip is dependent on good weather and the trip could be canceled if dangerous weather conditions exist. Registered participants would be called if the trip were cancelled.

The mission of the Friends is to support the Eastern California Museum and its program and to bring awareness of the museum to Eastern California residents and visitors.

For more information on this trip, call David at (760) 920-8061.

Throwback Thursday

Cerro Gordo mule power

A mule team hauls materials to the Cerro Gordo Mine sometime around the turn of the century. Mining operations took place in the Cerro Gordo area from 1866-1957, producing high-grade silver, lead and zinc ore. Some ore was smelted on site, but larger capacity smelters were eventually constructed along the shore of nearby Owens Lake. These smelting operations were the beginnings of the towns of Swansea and Keeler. Do you have a vintage photo – of yourself, your family or even local landmarks – you'd like featured for "Throwback Thursday" in an upcoming edition? If so, email it along with essential information to editor@inyoregister.com, or drop it off at the *Register* at 1180 N. Main St., Ste. 108, Bishop.

Photo courtesy Theona Wasson

Woman tackles project to restore Cerro Gordo town

1-22-1986

by Jodi Stewart

Fourteen years ago I drove the precipitous Cerro Gordo Road for the first time. Little did I realize the significance of that outing and that one day I would be devoting all my energies towards restoring the little town that created the economic climate for the enormous growth of the City of Los Angeles.

Cerro Gordo is situated at the 8500' elevation of the southern Inyo mountains. It's accessible via county maintained road, 7½ miles northeast of Keeler. Silver was discovered here in the 1860's and the mine and townsite were developed by Mortimer Belshaw and Victor Beaudry. Silver boullion bars were smelted at two of the three smelters on the property, loaded upon Remi Nadeau's mule drawn wagons and shipped to the site which was to become the Port of Los Angeles, San Pedro Harbor.

During peak production years, eighty teams pulled the "Yellow Grade Road" returning laden with barley, machinery, dry goods, and sundries needed by the growing number of residents of the remote mining town. At one time, according to P.A. Chalfant, Story of Inyo, there were more votes from the Cerro Gordo precinct than from any other within the county.

Two steamers, the Molly Stevens and the Bessie Brady, transported the precious cargo across the waters of the now dry Owens Lake, shaving three days from the thirty day round trip. Champagne and oysters were stage-coached in twice weekly from San Francisco. We're still uncovering caches of 1870's vintage champagne bottles and oyster shells from diggings around the American Hotel. (For wonderful historic accounts, one might enjoy reading **From This Mountain—Cerro Gordo** by Robert Likes and Glenn Day, and **City-Makers: The Story of Southern Cailfornia's First Boom** by Remi Nadeau.)

I suppose life's pathways are merely the consequences of the choices we make. Sometimes it seems as if there is a destiny. I always wanted a chance to return to my beloved Inyo with a dynamic purpose and worthwhile goals. This project provides those elements. My roots grow deeply here as I am a granddaughter (great great) of James Crocker, an 1864 pioneer rancher and businessman from Big Pine. He also owned the Deep Springs Ranch prior to L.L. Nunn. Destiny sees also to have brought a multi-talented newcomer to Cerro Gordo, Mike Patterson. he too has an affinity for history and near reverance for the rugged individuals who endured overwhelming obstacles and who turned adversity into phenominal success. One of Mike's first reactions to the unsightly chaos at Cerro Gordo was, "My God They're all forgotten that we're still writing history — it's our responsibility to add chapters."

Our monumental task centers around securing the nomination for a National Historic Registry based upon an economic premise. We hope to remind the nation that the little forgotten town nestled opposite glamorous Mt. Whitney was the "Comstock" to Los Angeles, which in turn spawned the growth of the West. We need also to replace the buildings and trinkets carried away by thousands of "collectors" and to ease the ravages of 121 years of difficult times. We need to collect and catalog valuable data so that generations to come can be assured access to Inyo's rich heritage and have a chance to add chapters of their own.

The Oakland Museum is preparing an exhibition entitled "Silver in the Golden State" which is scheduled to open in September. The spotlights will be Cerro Gordo and Virginia City. "But Virginia City is in the Silver State, " I protested gently to Edgar Morse, Ph.D., Oakland Museum History Department. "Yes," he replied, tongue in cheek, "but we figured California bankrolled her." Ed also tells me that the exhibit will travel throughout the United States for two years and has been booked into the Los Angeles Natural History Museum and the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming.

Among the many treasures Ed's staff has unearthed is a silver tea service by Gorham dated 1876, inscribed "S.C.B." and "Cerro Gordo Mines." One authority claims the owner to have been Sarah Benedick; another, the Belshaw family. They're still researching and Ed stresses that the museum is very interested in any artifacts, clothing, or data which could be used for the exhibition. Ed can be reached at (415) 273-3842. Our number up here is (619) 876-4154.

Our guest register indicates that about 2,000 people a year conquer the "Yellow Grade" unsolicited; some out of simple curiosity and a sense of adventure, but most out of a deep admiration for our ancestor's gutsy spirit. The "Gear Grinders" four-wheel drive club, Ridgecrest Chapter, has informally adopted Cerro Gordo and has made significant contributions towards conserving this piece of history. About twenty-five of them came up one August weekend with hammers, rakes, shovels, and pitch-forks to remove brush and debris from around the old wooden buildings. They nailed siding, replaced porch boards, stacked rocks, pushed, pulled, carried, stretched and sorted. They're written letters in support of our nomination and plan to return en masse to haul away an unsightly dump created by an insensitive lessee within the old livery stable compound. We understand the roof is still under the tons of trash but that the timbers and siding were sold and hauled away.

While on their geologic field mapping emcampment here, Humboldt State University faculty and students spent a day in July sanding, scraping, painting and rennovating the "Gordon" house. They also donated a wonderful bellows and some 1892 newspapers they discovered in a long forgotten tunnel. The Federal Aviation Administration and Continental Telephone greatly assisted our effort to install Cerro Gordo's first historic telephone service via microwave link. Don Branson, Lone Pine TV owner donated his valuable time and trenching equipment. "Jigger" Nelson, Big Pine Fire Chief and Con Tel draftsman, risked life and limb replacing old telephone pole insulators — and from his own cherished collection. He and Dorothy also provided antique pine flooring for the kitchen of the American Hotel. Heaven only knows who carried away the original.

My homecoming has been warm and rewarding. The merchants throughout the valley have been enthusiastic and eager to assist. With only one exception, the county administration has been genuinely interested and supportive of this endeavor. Given that a project without obstacles, controversy and difficulty is surely one lacking merit, we accept the challenge before us and hope that the ensuing months will prove productive. We have our work cut out for us. If we're going to be spotlighted, we need to look good. We welcome your comments and suggestions. You may write to us at P.O. Box 221, Keeler, CA 93530. Or better yet, drive on up!

Jody Stewart stands by this relic of the past which has seen the halcyon days of all the glory of a mining camp.

Cerro Gordo mining camp

By Frances Park
Inyo Register columnist

Toward a world of long ago, our old 4 X 4 truck valiantly responded to the challenge of the winding road to Cerro Gordo mining camp. Despite some reports, we found the road is not too bad; well scraped, although steep and winding in some spots. Rounding a bend, we found history. It was not a sleepy ghost town resting complacently in the sun, however. There was activity everywhere, under the energetic supervision of the lady who "owns the mountain."

Jody Stewart, with a gracious smile and sparkling enthusiasm, welcomed us to the refurbishing of what was once the bustling economic center of Inyo County. With pride she invited us into her personal residence, the former home of Louis O. Gordon, who developed the zinc deposits which created Cerro Gordo's second great production period.

The house, built in 1904, has been tastefully and comfortably restored, including antique furnishings, and has retained its turn of the century charm and authenticity — including a bullet hole or two in the ceiling.

At the time of my visit excavations were going on by two regular volunteers, Tip Shields of Lone Pine and Don Becker of Independence. At the time they were digging out the remains of a former bordello.

There were also members of Bishop's Boy Scout Troop #88, with troop leader Mac McElvogue and assistant leader Steve Padin, as well as Larry Brolsma of Wilkerson.

The scouts were earning their Historic Trails badges and were housed in the restored bunk house.

"We can't just load up a dump truck and haul away what looks like junk," said Jody, as we passed the livery stable filled with sand and debris. "It all has to be excavated and sifted carefully lest we throw away the good."

Her recent invitation for volunteers brought responses from 62 people, who spent the weekend digging out five feet of sand and artifacts after jacking up the American House Hotel. Everything of historical value is kept and carefully stored.

Jody has far-sighted plans for that hotel, as well as the rest of Cerro Gordo. A former TV actress and real estate person in Beverly Hills, she was raised in Big Pine and graduated from Big Pine High School with the class of 1962, among 15 students.

"I became weary of the "Wilshire Boulevard" lifestyle and was seeking nourishment for my heart and soul. When I saw Cerro Gordo I knew I had found it, and I intended to paint and write. I made my move immediately, and gradually managed to acquire property bit by bit, until it was all mine. I started the restoration work and I have not found time to paint or write since."

She receives moral support and encouragement from her partner, Mike Patterson. His expertise as a building contractor is evident in the quality of the reconstruction. As we stood at the center of the town, he informed me there were 37 miles of tunnels beneath our feet.

"We advise much caution by all of our visitors," he said. "I have personally sealed most of the mine openings and we have warnings posted to make everyone aware. Some areas are restricted."

Later, as we stood high above the town at Castlerock Peak, he pointed out the APCD sprinkler project between Keeler and Swansea, and said he had grown a 75 square foot crop of barley near there last spring. He has interesting theories about possibilities for Owens Lake.

Preparations for winter hardships include survival foods for 60 days. Winter weather can be brutal; temperatures have reached 57 below zero with the wind chill factor.

"If I can't heat the shop building to 15 above, I just don't work there. We heat the house with three wood stoves, two propane, and several portable electric heaters."

As we sipped a frosty mug of lemonade in her kitchen, Jody talked of the vision and initiative of her great-great-grandfather, Jim Crocker. Perhaps some of his attributes are mirrored in her abilities and determination to preserve Cerro Gordo.

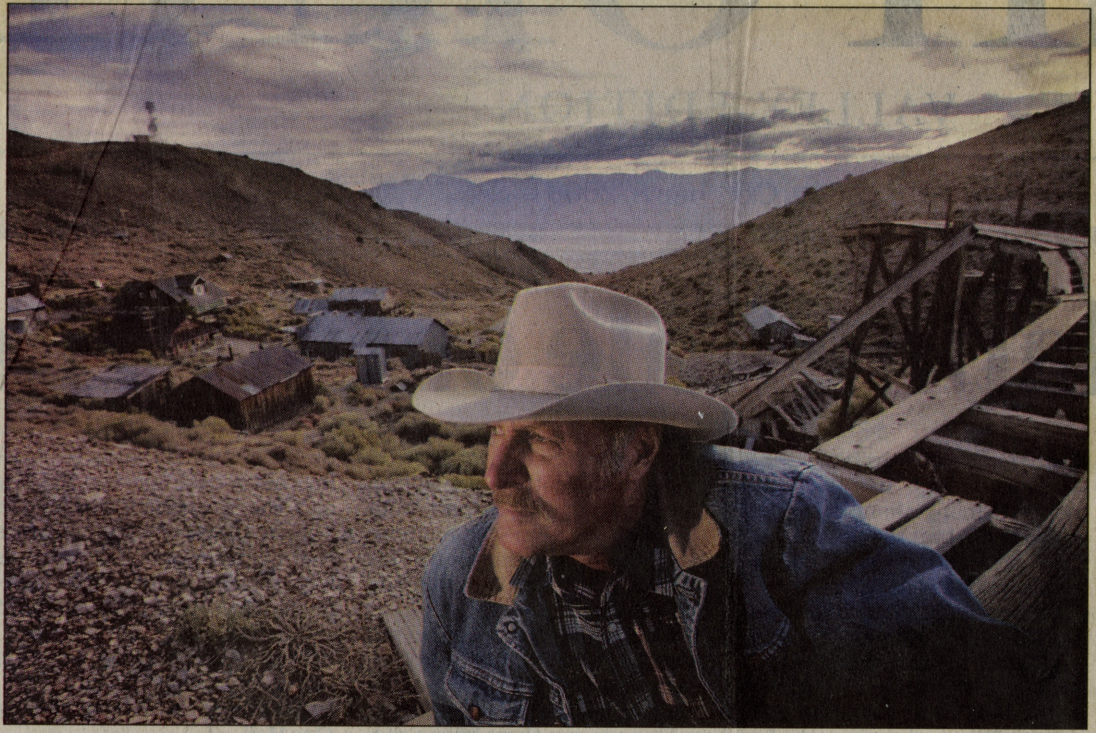
"We are not working to commercialize, but rather to salvage and preserve it, particularly for the children of Owens Valley; they need to have knowledge and pride in the history. There is much misunderstanding about the accessibility of the road to the old town. It is open to visitors who come with respect and caring for the treasures we have worked hard to save and preserve.

"Cerro Gordo mining was the early economic force which helped to build the city of Los Angeles into a center of business, supply and commerce. We have not had help from them in our preservation efforts. Every drop of our water has to be hauled in. Even a dependable water truck would help."

L.A. Times 10-8-2006

The mining site high above Owens Valley went bust in 1888. Now its owner is restoring it to a state of 'arrested decay' for visitors.

By CECILIA RASMUSSEN
Times Staff Writer



DON KELSEN *Los Angeles Times*

MAN ABOUT TOWN: *Owner Michael Patterson says the only sound to be heard in Cerro Gordo "is the whistle of the wind blowing through all the bullet holes in every building."*

CERRO GORDO, Calif. — Some say ghosts walk the dusty streets of this abandoned silver-mining town.

With a murder a week in the 1860s and '70s, bloodshed permeates its history.

Cerro Gordo, meaning "fat hill," is an Old West settlement in the shadow of Mt. Whitney, on the eastern outskirts of Lone Pine. After the Civil War, it became "fat city" for silver miners, who shipped their diggings to Los Angeles.

Unlike other California ghost towns that are parks — such as Bodie and Calico — Cerro Gordo is privately owned. And the owner intends to restore it in honor of his late wife, whose family owned the 100-acre-plus town.

Michael Patterson's goal is to keep the town in a state of "arrested decay" and to finish its first chapel, all dedicated to Jody Stewart Patterson. He has braced sagging buildings and rebuilt others so carefully that nothing looks new. The only sound in town, Patterson says, "is the whistle of the wind blowing through all the bullet holes in every building up here."

The town prospered after the Civil War until 1888, when it was abandoned — except for occasional zinc-mining revivals.

"Growing up here, a fifth-generation resident of Owens Valley, Jody had never heard of Cerro Gordo," Patterson said, until she bought a 25% share of the town from her uncle in 1973 and the rest in 1984. Her uncle's wife had inherited the town.

Patterson, a history buff and former wind-energy entrepreneur, shared Stewart's love of the Wild West and began helping her restore the town in 1985. The couple were married in 1999. She died in 2001 of cancer and is buried in the cemetery atop the hill.

This tough little town, 8,500 feet high above the dry lakebed of Owens Valley, once boasted a population of 4,800 hardy souls and 1,600 mules. It had 700 working mining claims and 37 miles of tunnels, plus five hotels, seven saloons, two brothels and a 600-plot graveyard.

"The mines of Cerro Gordo built Los Angeles as much as the Owens Valley water did," Patterson said. "This was California's Comstock Lode," producing 4.5 million ounces of silver in the 1860s, '70s and '80s.

A group of Mexican miners found silver here in 1865 and named the site Cerro Gordo, after a mountain pass in Mexico. Victor Beaudry, a former prospector and French Canadian merchant at nearby Ft. Independence, was impressed with the quality of the ore. He opened a general store in town and began staking claims to mining property, according to the 1948 book "City-Makers" by Remi Nadeau, a descendant of a town pioneer.

The mines proved to contain a fair amount of silver, but prospectors were hampered by another sort of ore that seemed worthless. But in 1867, San Francisco miner Mortimer Belshaw tested a sample and found that it was rich in lead, essential in smelting silver ore. Beaudry and Belshaw became partners, transforming the mining camp into a boomtown.

In 1868, Belshaw took the first wagonload of silver 250 miles south to Los Angeles. "Each ingot or bar was 18 inches long, weighing about 83 pounds," and worth about $35, Patterson said. The ingots were displayed at hotels, banks and businesses, boosting Cerro Gordo's reputation as another bonanza, like Virginia City, Nev.

Beaudry and Belshaw awarded a three-year freight contract to French Canadian Remi Nadeau, an ancestor of the author. He hauled 30 tons of ore a month to Los Angeles with 20-mule teams and, on the return trip, carted lumber, grain, flour, potatoes, chickens, picks, shovels, machinery and whiskey to Beaudry's store, where they were sold at a hefty profit.

By then, nothing could keep fortune seekers from Cerro Gordo — not fierce winters, knee-deep spring mud, gunfights or swindlers.

Miners lubricated with whiskey settled fights over women and politics with pistols. Claim jumpers tunneled into the base of the mountain from all sides, prompting more gunfights.

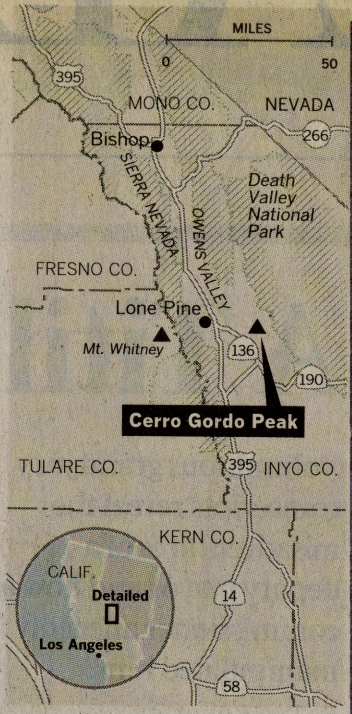
There was no genteel side of life here — no schools or churches — but Cerro Gordo had its charms. At separate ends of town, two buxom madams and their bevies of painted, frilled and scandalously clad ladies welcomed miners and threw lavish parties. The miners found them just as alluring as the silver.

Cerro Gordo's deadliest mine disaster struck in the early 1870s when a cave-in killed at least eight and as many as 35 Chinese miners. They were mining in limestone below the 200-foot level and failed to shore up the tunnel with timber, former Cerro Gordo mining foreman Fred Fisher told a Times reporter in 1950. Their bodies were never recovered.

About this time, two steamships — the Bessie Brady and the Molly Stevens — shaved four days off the 28-day trip between Cerro Gordo and Los Angeles by speeding silver ingots across Owens Lake. On the opposite shore, near Cartago, the silver was loaded onto wagons and shipped to Los Angeles via a string of changing stations.

Meantime, Cerro Gordo was

over



Sources: ESRI, TeleAtlas

Los Angeles Times

becoming a community. In 1875, Lulu Lewis, 15, and Army Lt. Al Wopplehorst exchanged vows before hundreds of guests in the first wedding at the two-story American Hotel, the fanciest in town. (And it's still standing.)

After dancing until dawn, according to Dorothy C. Cragen, author of the 1975 book "The Boys in the Sky-Blue Pants," the wedding party rode down the hill, holding tightly to empty kegs in the beer wagon, then continued celebrating aboard the Bessie Brady.

The steamship Molly Stevens was dismantled in 1882 and its engines were installed in the Bessie Brady. Work was nearly complete when the Brady burned at the dock. There was no silver aboard, according to Robert C. Likes and Glenn R. Day, authors of the 1975 book "From This Mountain — Cerro Gordo."

Yet rumors persist that the Molly Stevens capsized on the lake in 1878, killing 14 and depositing a booty of silver at the bottom. According to Times stories, an anchor was dug up from the dry lake in 1951 and, 11 years later, a pilot discovered a rusted propeller and lifeboat. As late as 1988, a group of Orange County businessmen-turned-treasure-hunters went drilling but found nothing.

The railroad arrived in 1883, making it easier to move the silver. Nadeau sold his mule teams and built a Los Angeles hotel at 1st and Spring streets — where The Times now stands.

But the price of silver began to drop in the late 1870s, and by 1888 Cerro Gordo was practically deserted. Only 30 to 40 miners remained, "getting their living as best they can," according to a state mineralogist's report that year.

Cerro Gordo achieved some Hollywood fame in several sagebrush sagas, including 1957's "Night Passage," starring James Stewart and Audie Murphy; 1966's "Nevada Smith," starring Steve McQueen; and 1967's "Waterhole #3," starring James Coburn and Claude Akins.

For decades, Cerro Gordo was pretty much left to the ghosts, until Stewart and Patterson turned a building into a bed-and-breakfast in 1986.

Patterson keeps a photograph of a town ghost: a hotel window screen that appears to show the face of a man with deep-set eyes, a big nose and a square jaw. Supposedly it's Alphonse Benoit, who was killed in a nearby woodcutters camp in the 1870s, Patterson says. He destroyed the screen to placate his jittery wife.

Today, Beaudry's general store is a museum filled with antique leftovers, including empty whiskey and beer bottles, a pair of long johns with shell buttons, ceramic vases, medicine bottles and kerosene lamps. The only modern thing is the guest registry, which recorded nearly 4,000 visitors last year.

"It's mostly the rust and dust that people appreciate about the museum," Patterson said.

B&B guests brave an 8-mile steep and narrow gravel incline in four-wheel-drive vehicles to stay in Belshaw's 1876 home, complete with 156 bullet holes, or in the 1904 bunkhouse. Dinner is served in the 1871 hotel.

The town's authenticity extends to the period plumbing — or lack thereof.

"A guest wrote thanking us for the nice touch of talcum powder in the outhouse," Patterson said. In fact, he said with a laugh, "It's quicklime."

cecilia.rasmussen@latimes.com

CERRO GORDO

by Bob Austin

Cerro Gordo means "big hill," an appropriate tag for a site that reputedly yielded over $17,000,000 in silver over a short period of time, from 1872-79. Although it is likely that the surface was worked prior to Cerro Gordo's "discovery" by Pablo Flores in 1865, it was not given due attention until 1866, when the San Lucas Mine was developed by Joe Ochoa, and Victor Beaudry opened his store there. (Beaudry was thus to follow suit of other modest storekeepers, such as Leland Stanford and S.D. Ghiradelli, who amassed large fortunes in the mining bonanzas via shrewd dealings.)

Flores and two companions discovered the San Felipe outcropping while prospecting in the Inyos. The Flores party worked the surface of the carbonate heart-rock for pockets of pod-shaped masses of lead-silver ore bodies. Since there was no main lode, they dug in a random trenching method known as "coyote digging."

According to Flores, his party was captured by Indians and his two partners were killed. Pablo was released by his captors, only after promising not to return there again. While it is not known what religious significance the Paiute-Shoshone people attached to their "Dwelling place of a great spirit," they did gather pine nuts from trees that grew above the 6000-foot elevation and carved utensils, ornaments and effigies from the talc deposits found throughout the area.

Pablo kept his promise for two years, but returned to Cerro Gordo with a large party of hungry miners who had seen his ore samples in Virginia City. Eventually all trees within 100 square miles of Cerro Gordo would be stripped to feed the smelting furnaces. The Mexican miners built small adobe *hornito* ovens and larger *vasos* to heat the gangue from the ore. Crude loaves of lead-silver were formed as the gangue cooled. Though primitive, the ore taken from the early Cerro Gordo operations was of such high quality that the Mexican ovens were profitable.

Meanwhile, Victor Beaudy was acquiring mining properties through judgments executed to compensate for his liberal lines of credit extended to such patrons as Jose Ochoa (San Lucas Mine), Jesus Almada (partner with Ochoa in the Union Mine), and Jesus Lozano (a store owner who had interests in several claims). He encouraged a friend from San Francisco, Mortimer Belshaw, to venture his capital and expertise in Cerro Gordo. Belshaw and another partner, Abner B. Elder, had extensive experience in the silver mines of Mexico. Belshaw and Elder had financial connections in San Francisco, where Cerro Gordo's bullion would eventually be shipped, following its freighting by mule team through Los Angeles to the Port of San Pedro.

After obtaining the needed financial support, Belshaw would oversee the building of a smelter, construct a toll road (Yellow Grade), and pipe in water from nearby springs. It was this infusion of capital improvements that would cause Los Angeles, then a town of 10,000, to regard Cerro Gordo as its "Comstock."

The smelter was built at a site convenient to Belshaw's holdings of galena ore deposits. Galena was essential to the smelting of silver; hence the name "galamadores", or "galamidors" given to slag furnaces. Located in a saddle of the ridge below Buena Vista Peak (now known as Cerro Cordo Peak), Belshaw's first smelter was a slag reverberatory furnace which made more efficient use of time and fuel than did the Mexican ovens. A state minerologist, Goodyear, who visited Cerro Gordo as early as 1872, reported that a galamidor required 1.75 cords of wood and 30 bushels of charcoal over a period of 24 hours to process 10 to 12 tons of ore, yielding 90 to 100 bars, valued at $19 each.

Belshaw would later add a blast furnace, which had a greater yield capacity than that of the hill's other galamidors combined. Still another smelting improvement was the addition of a water jacket surrounding the furnace to insure equal distribution of heat. The production of charcoal for the furnaces, however, remained primitive. Local wood was burned in crude earthen trenches, an inefficient process known to be at least 2,000 years old. The stone or adobe beehive kilns known to other Great Basin areas — such as the Wildrose kilns, the Ward kilns or Colonel Steven's kilns — were not in use upon the mountain.

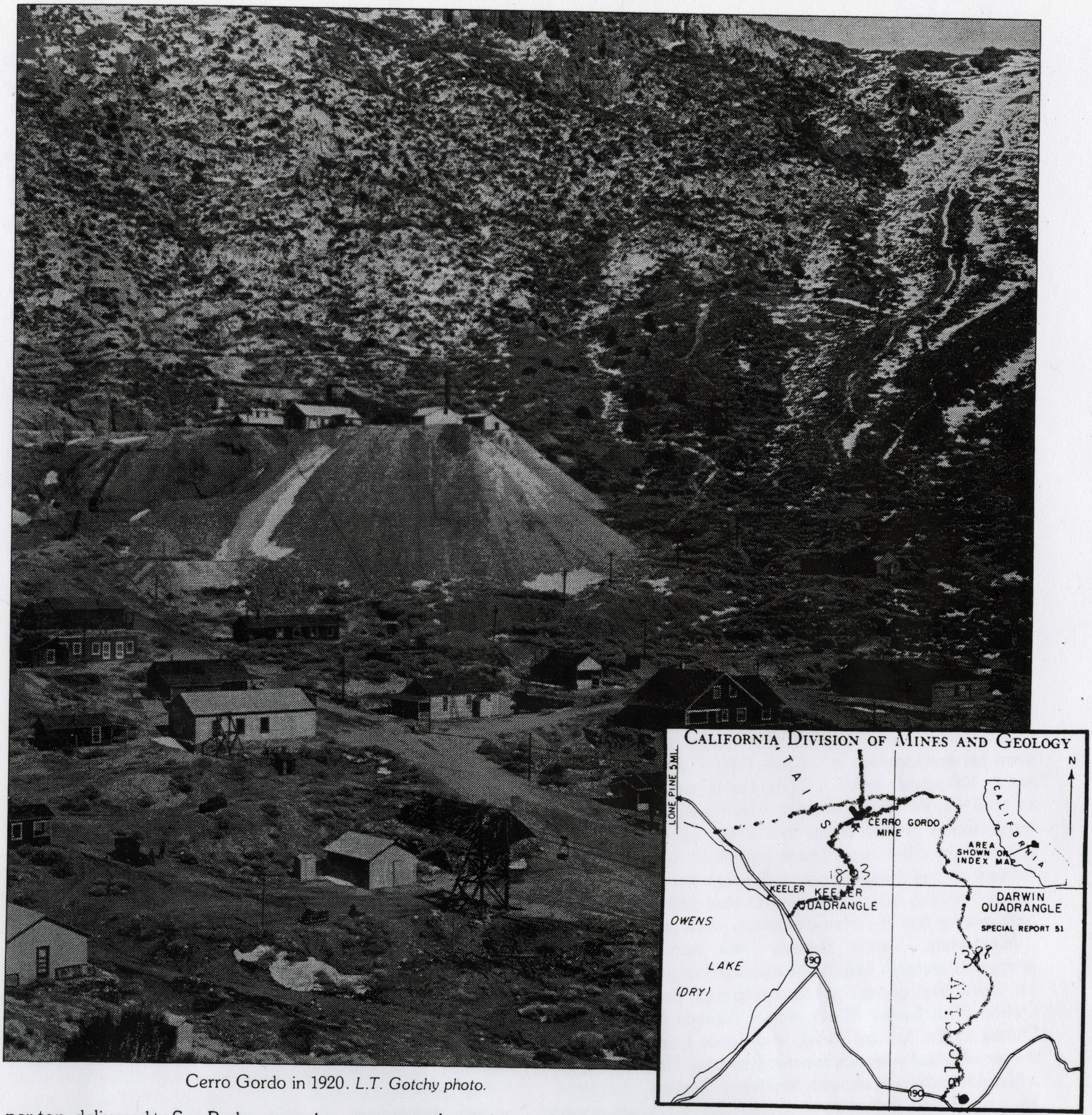
The road to Cerro Gordo from Keeler was hewn from basaltic rock and sulfite formations by Chinese work gangs. This wagon road opened the way for the transport of heavy equipment needed for hardrock mining and for shipments of lead-silver loaves coming down the grade in locked-hub wagons. Remi Nadeau, the famous Los Angeles teamster, who five years earlier had started in the freighting business with a loan from Victor Beaudry's brother, was awarded a three-year contract to deliver Cerro Gordo's rough bullion to Los Angeles. By the end of the first year, over 340 tons of bullion had been transported.

With each return trip came staples from Los Angeles to supply the mines. A given team would make eight round trips per year, each team paying its levy at Belshaw's toll gate, located atop the Yellow Grade Road.

Prior to the tapping of Cerro Gordo Springs, water came to Cerro Gordo by pack train. Belshaw's pipeline, which worked by gravity flow, brought the site some 1,300 gallons per day; about 1.8 gallons per claim. This reduced the cost of water from the previous 10 cents per gallon to about 3.5 cents, depending upon flow. The pipes were, however, exposed to the elements and delivery was often uncertain. Intermittently, residents of Cerro Gordo had to revert to water by pack train, with delivery at the higher-elevation Belmont Mine costing a minimum of 12.5 cents per gallon.

Stephen Boushey established the Cerro Gordo Water Company in 1874, bringing water to Cerro Gordo from Miller Springs. The ten-mile pipeline was buried properly to protect it from the elements, and worked by the lifting of three Gardner-Denver pumps in series with gravity flow.

Although it is reported that the net profit of the ore processed through Belshaw's smelters ran as high as $150



Cerro Gordo in 1920. *L.T. Gotchy photo.*

per ton, delivered to San Pedro, as early as 1870 it was argued that transportation costs were extracting an undue toll. The **Inyo Independent** argued that the costs of wagon freighting were prohibitive (August 8, 1880). The paper estimated that transportation costs for Cerro Gordo bullion, traveling to San Pedro by Nadeau's teamsters and by ship to San Francisco, exceeded $36,000 per month. The paper projected a $10,000 per month savings, should railroad transportation be substituted at Visalia.

However, since the high quality ore was still yielding a healthy net profit per ton, despite freight costs, Belshaw and Beaudry were to continue to ignore certain long economies associated with hardrock mining. Instead, they employed their energies in trying to force out the remaining local competition. This task was to meet with little success, as the Mexican miners, working as it were under a different economy, never abandoned the area.

The rails did come to Cerro Gordo. The Carson and Colorado established a terminus at Keeler, but not until 1878 when the high grade ores had been worked out. Soda from Owens Lake became the major object of transport. Keeler remained the Southern terminus of the Carson and Colorado, which was sold to Southern Pacific in

1900. The SPRR realized its investment with the turn-of-the-century booms in Candelaria, Mina and Tonopah. The line was closed in 1959 due to "declining and unpredictable use. . ."

Other innovations in transportation were developed to support the transport of Cerro Gordo bullion. When Remi Nadeau's contract reached its term in December 1871, it was awarded to James Brady, supervisor of the smelting operations at Swansea. Brady had underbid Nadeau, but had also underbid the magnitude of Cerro Gordo's freighting demands. In February of 1872, he and D. H. Ferguson commenced building the "Bessie Brady," a steamboat intended to transport Cerro Gordo bullion from Swansea to Cartago at the southern tip of Lake Owens, saving 3 to 5 days travel time by the muleteers.

However, the continual surge of bullion from Belshaw's smelters and a bottleneck in desert freighting to the South soon brought Brady's scheme to ridicule. Silver ingots were stacked upon the wharves of Cartago like cordwood in July. Brady's efficiency in utilizing the lake for a savings dramatized his failure to make adequate arrangements at the other end. The contract was forfeited and Belshaw signed another with a teamster from Bakersfield, J. Chester.

Chester, too, was unable to complete the contract, as heavy rains washed out the road through the Tehachapis to Bakersfield, and Chester's horses fell victim to a plague. By May of 1873, it is reported that as many as 30,000 ingot loaves were stacked at Cartago, waiting for freighters. Belshaw and Brady met Nadeau on one of his return runs from the Nevada mines and prevailed upon him to resume shipping Cerro Gordo's bullion. Nadeau agreed, provided that Belshaw and Brady would invest capital in the new Cerro Gordo Freighting Company, assuring that adequate way stations would be established between Cerro Gordo and Los Angeles. By June of 1873, the familiar drag chains of Nadeau's mule teams were heard once more.

Hauling cable going to Cerro Gordo. *John Jones photo.*

The Bessie Brady, docked at Swansea and out of operation within five months of its maiden voyage, would later be purchased by Colonel Sherman Stevens. Stevens was an entrepreneur with a background in military engineering. Securing a loan from the Owens Lake Company, he established a sawmill in the Sierra Nevada to supply fuel to Cerro Gordo. The forests of the Inyo range were being stripped by charcoal burners, and it would only be a matter of time before the products of Stevens' mill were in heavy demand.

A trail was cut up Cottonwood Canyon, about 6,000 feet from the base. A flume was constructed to haul the milled lumber 13 miles down the flow of Cottonwood Creek to the base. By November of 1873, the flumes were completed, and milled lumber was deposited near the confluence of Cottonwood Creek and Owens Lake. The timing of Stevens' fuel supply for Cerro Gordo was pivotal, as the Inyos had become virtually exhausted.

Stevens would eventually build the adobe charcoal kilns, which still stand east of Highway 395 north of Cartago. The kilns, twenty feet wide and twenty feet high, were constructed of adobe brick, laid in beehive fashion. Air vents near the base controlled the flow.

During the same time (1876-77), Stevens brought the "Mollie Stevens" to Lake Owens, using Keeler as his eastshore terminus. Somewhat smaller than the "Bessie Brady," the "Mollie Stevens" is said to have resembled a tugboat, as opposed to a lake steamer.

If these later two improvements were intended for the exclusive purpose of rendering services to Cerro Gordo, they must be viewed as foolhardy; Cerro Gordo's mills began to decline in production in 1876, a fact that was no secret. And although Nadeau's Cerro Gordo Freighting Company was not without its problems, the maiden voyage of the "Mollie Stevens" would be no salvo to Remi's mules. The mother lode of Cerro Gordo was not to be found. This fact stirred the gambler's fallacy in many speculators. There were the prospects of Darwin or Coso hitting it big. There were Mina and Mammoth to the north. But whatever Stevens' reasons, his latter ventures failed.

Lode litigation, which was to plague other mining operations of this era, came to Cerro Gordo. A lengthy battle ensued between the San Felipe and the Union Mine interests concerning the extension of the galena deposits between the two claims. Big money was

involved in lode litigation; namely, money for consulting engineers and attorneys. After an appellate motion was filed on behalf of the Union Mine interests (who had lost at the Superior Court level), an out-of-court settlement was negotiated in 1875. As important as this litigation may have been to the parties, it did not have a major impact upon Cerro Gordo's decline, and the extent of the litigation in the area must be viewed as minor when weighed against the other extensive lode litigation which seemed to be seizing the country at this time.

In 1876, Belshaw cooled his furnaces at Cerro Gordo. The high grade ore had apparently run out, and the ores of lesser value could not sustain the prohibitive freight costs. In 1877, a fire destroyed what remained of Belshaw's operations. In 1888, all the major furnaces were shut down. The last shipment of Cerro Gordo's lead-silver loaves came down the Yellow Grade in October, 1879. Locked hubs were not needed, as the load was relatively light.

Several attempts to revive Cerro Gordo, a town which once had a population of 3,500, followed. An example of the town's shrinkage following the demise of its glory days is perhaps best summarized by California State Minerologist W. A. Goodyear's findings of 1888: in July of that year he found some 40 souls ekeing out a living in the area as best they could.

It is recommended that if you are planning to visit the ghost town of Cerro Gordo, which looms in the Inyos above the Owens Valley at some 8,500 feet, check in with the Interagency Visitor Center just south of Lone Pine to determine weather and road conditions. Mrs. Graham, an Information Officer with the Center, was helpful in interpreting my BLM map when I sought an alternate route to the Cerro Gordo town site. The Cerro Gordo Road ("Old Yellow Grade") could not be negotiated as snow was banked heavily in a shady marbled canyon about four miles up from Keeler.

When open, the Yellow Grade Road from Keeler, once proud terminus of the Carson & Colorado narrow gauge, is the preferable route, although four-wheel drive is highly recommended. You should carry an ample water

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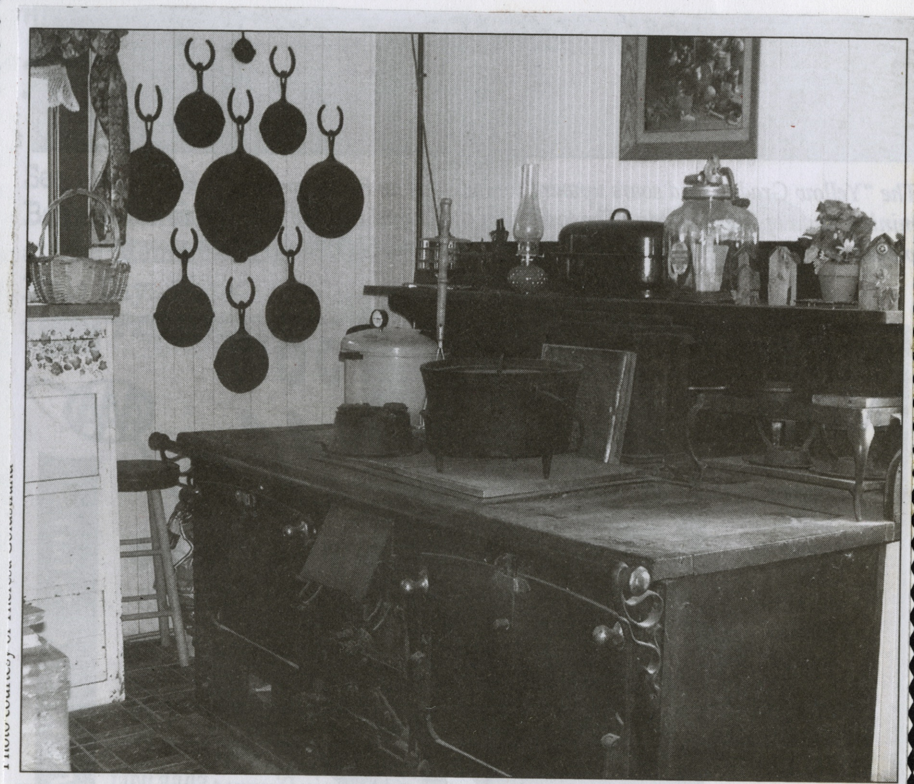
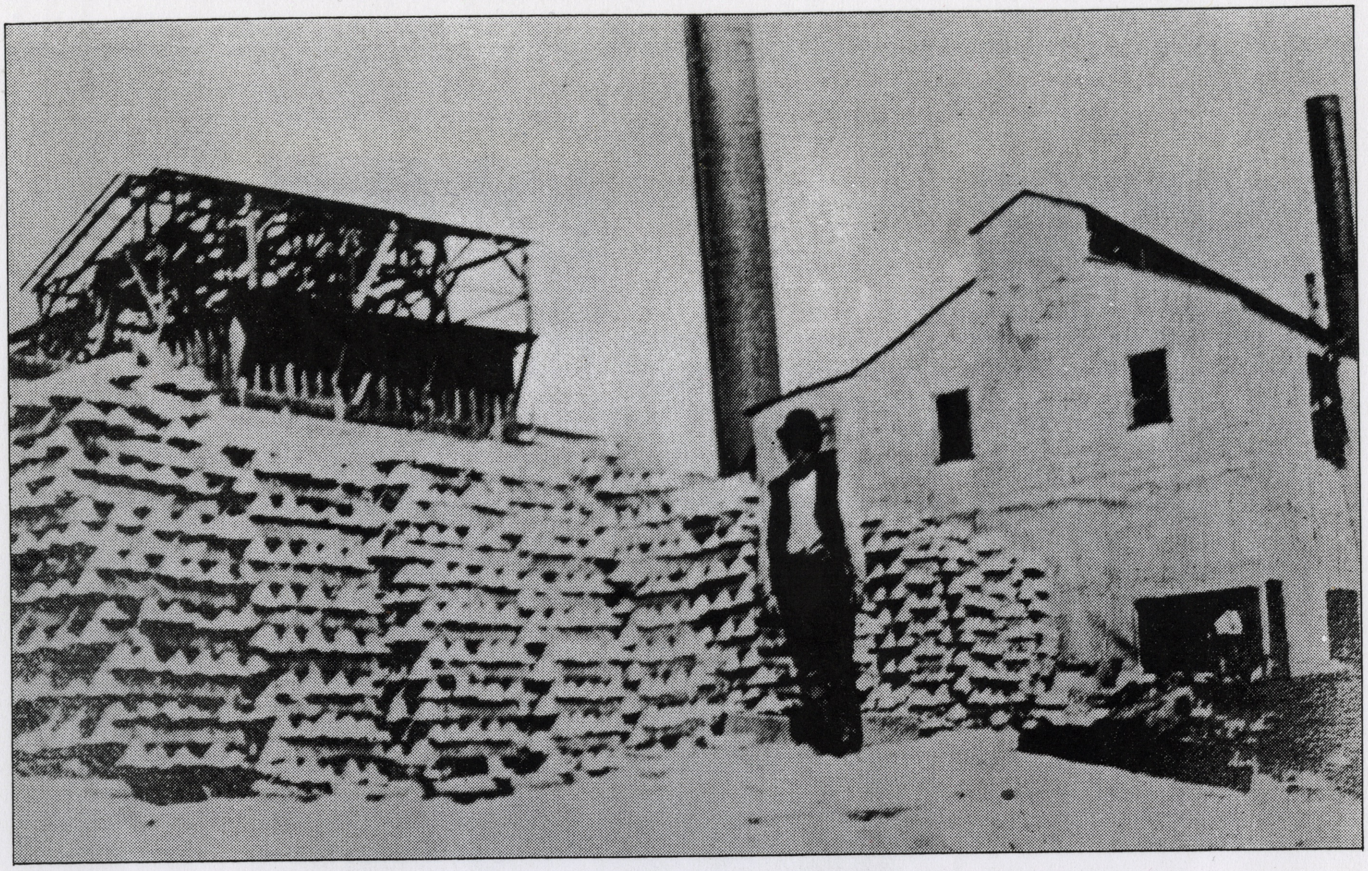


The American Hotel kitchen at Cerro Gordo has authentic, 19th-century appliances.



Stockpile of bullion at Cerro Gordo.

supply, since the steep, 8-mile road may agitate your radiator. But don't dismay, it's an easier trip by motor vehicle than by freight wagon, once pulled up the grade by Remi Nadeau's 18-mule teams.

You should devote a full day's trip to Cerro Gordo, especially if the Cerro Gordo Road out of Keeler is closed. My alternate route took me up Highway 190 near the Darwin turnoff to a road marked 'Talc City.' Several talc mines are visible from the road. The Talc City Mine was for many years the nation's principal source of steatite grade talc (Insulator Manufacturing). Together with the Western Mine in south Inyo County and the Silver Dollar Mine in San Bernardino, these mines were the principal source of talc in California between 1916 and 1931.

Take the road numbered 1388 on the BLM maps north, past the Viking Mine. 1388 is known as the Santa Rosa Road or the San Lucas Road. This is catch-as-catch-can, but the road itself shows more evidence of travel than its forks. Some 12 miles in, you'll enter San Lucas Canyon, named for Ochoa's mine, the first opened in Cerro Gordo. About three miles later, you'll encounter Cerro Gordo Road (numbered 1803). Turn left. Four miles later, you'll be in Cerro Gordo, amidst its tailing heaps, old tunnels, a headframe or two, and signs of switchback trails where mule trains brought water or wood. Look for the trail to the Belmont Mine at the south end of town. The old American Hotel still stands, as do stone chimneys of galamidors and foundations of several other buildings. A stone corral remains near the toolgate site off the Old Yellow Grade.

Or, you can look for the main lode. No one has ever found it. □

Bringing wood to Cerro Gordo.

Michael Andrew Patterson

Michael Andrew Patterson
1947-2009

Beloved friend, fellow desert rat and Cerro Gordo icon Michael Andrew Patterson died Sept. 24, 2009 at the age of 62.

Michael was born in Clovis, N.M. on Jan. 17, 1947. He moved to Oregon as a baby, and lived there until 1961. The family then moved to California, where he graduated from Navato High School in Marin County. He enlisted in the Navy right after high school with a friend on the Buddy System and was a Vietnam veteran, honorably discharged in August of 1969.

The family moved to Bakersfield in the mid-1970s. Michael married Sherry Smith in the late 1970s and had three sons, Sean, Heath and Tyler. He was a licensed contractor and was the first company to go on line with wind power in the Tehachapi area. His many talents included saddle making, designing a carbon-fiber light-weight saddle tree; leather tooling; and he was also an accomplished guitar player.

Michael moved to Cerro Gordo in 1985 with Owens Valley-born Jody Hardin Stewart, and together they took on the task of keeping Cerro Gordo alive and well and in a state of restorative reuse. Bringing out the best in all the volunteers who came from far and wide, the many talents in different fields of expertise, kept this dream alive. They met people from all over the world in this little mining camp that was the Comstock to the sleepy little Mexican Pueblo of Los Angeles. Mike and Jody brought the life back into the little camp and put it back on the map by way of magazines and newspapers, short films and documentaries.

Mike and Jody's creativity can be seen all over town, from the beautiful kitchen he built Jody in the Gordon house, the deck outside the General Store & Museum, the restoration of the 1871 American Hotel, to the remaking of a garage into the first chapel/theater ever in Cerro Gordo. He never got to see this project completed so the volunteers have taken up the task … and raised the steeple the weekend after his passing for and in honor of their friend.

Michael was preceded in death by his second wife, Jody Stewart-Patterson, in 2001, and his father, Tommy, in 2003, and has now been rejoined with them in Heaven.

He is survived by his mother, Jo; his three sons, Sean, Heath and Tyler; his two brothers, Jeff and David; and his sister, Lisa, all of Bakersfield.

A crew of students conducts an interview at the recently restored Cerro Gordo, once a booming mining town high in the Inyo Mountains. program on Mining Camps and Mule Teams, featured on the Roadside Heritage™ CD "Paiutes, Prospectors, and Pioneers." Photos sub

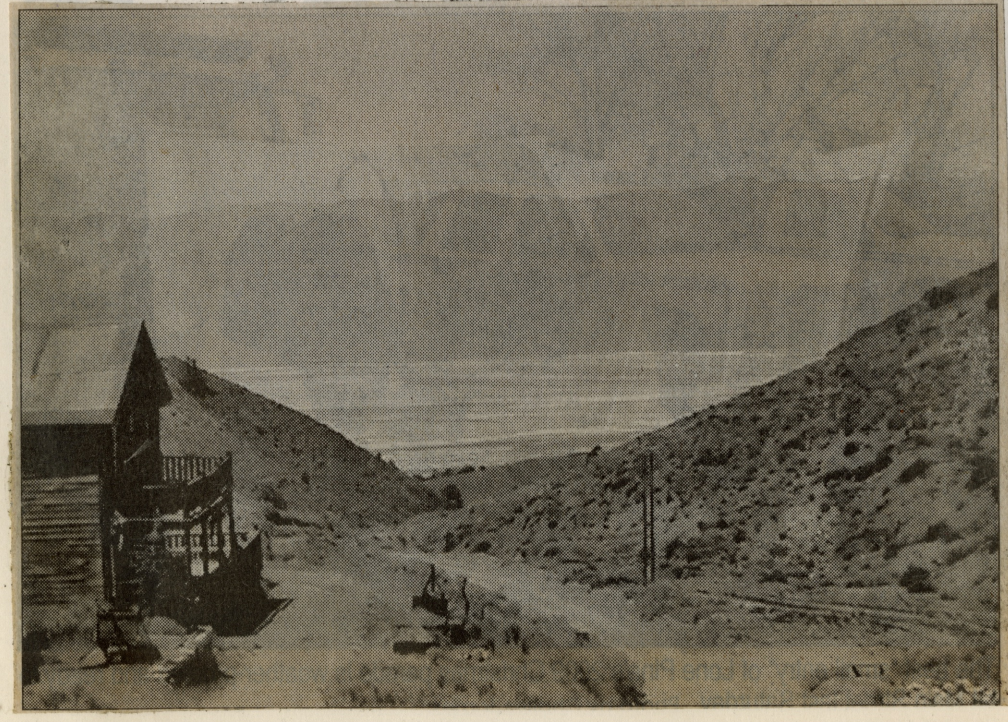
Critically acclaimed history projects hit local bookstores

Eastern Sierra Institute for Collaborative Education

Winding slowly along the dirt road that twists and turns its way 5,000 feet up to Cerro Gordo in the Inyo Range above Owens Lake, the van driver finally stops in a dusty pullout next to an old wooden building. This old hotel had been lovingly restored by Cerro Gordo's last owner and caretaker. Sweeping vistas across the Owens Valley to the majestic crest of the Sierra Nevada greet the half a dozen middle school students that tumble from the van. Chatting and giggling, they get down to the business at hand, and work as a team to set up video cameras, digital recorders and sound equipment.

Headphones in place, tripods adjusted and microphones held just so, a hush fell over the crew as the interview began. On this day, the students were collecting an interview about mining history at Cerro Gordo. The valley shimmered in the distance as stories of steam ships and mule teams that carried silver ingots across the desert recalled a time of daring dreams and exhausting work. As part of a 4-H Audio/Video Production Class, the students had already interviewed mule experts and museum curators to learn about Eastern Sierra history and some of the colorful characters that roamed the region that is simply "home" to these young people.

As they worked camera angles, snapped still photos and struggled to adjust sound levels in the ever-present wind, the students were also thinking about how to include this interview in the podcast programs they would create when they get back to the classroom. Care and concentration here were important, as the stories recounted by the owner of the mining camp ghost town would become a vivid chapter in an audio program on Mining Camps and Mule Teams.



A GHOST TOWN THAT'S STILL ALIVE

From the base of the mountains at Keeler, the "Yellow Grade" road reaches upward, teetering up to the top of an 8000' pass and spilling into the restored mining town of Cerro Gordo. It's a slow, winding, beautiful drive over a county-maintained dirt road. From the top of the road, as you look west into Owens Valley, you can easily imagine what it must have been like over 100 years ago. The mountaintop terrain was rugged, water was scarce, and banshee winds ripped through the gullies that lay exposed above tree line in the remote Inyo Mountains.

Roving bands of Mexican hard rock miners traversed the rocky crags, seeking their "El Dorado." They scoured the harsh desert mountains and valleys they named Sierra Nevada, Buena Vista, Coso, Manzanar, Olancha, and Cerro Gordo. Around 1865, a tattered band of miners, led by Pablo Flores, found silver ore trace near the summit of Buena Vista Peak. They extracted what they could with their picks and shovels, buckets, and burros. They built crude adobe ovens, or *vasos*, to process their ore. Heat reflected downward from the open-hearth fire and across the ore, separating out the precious silver.

At an elevation of 8500', the isolated high desert mines became known as Cerro Gordo, "Fat Hill", for its silver bounty. The San Lucas mine was one of the first successful mines here. Jose Ochoa operated San Lucas and extracted thousands of tons of ore with the help of his Mexican laborers. Cerro Gordo became legendary when one of the men saddled up and carried his silver ore samples to Virginia City. Assayers determined the ore was superior. The news exploded like fireworks on the Fourth of July and a freefall of hopefuls descended upon Cerro Gordo.

Initially, Cerro Gordo was pocked with surface mines — chiseled and cracked with pick and shovel. With news of the strike, thousands migrated to Cerro Gordo creating a boomtown, and money followed.

Equipment, men, and machinery tunneled deep into the hills and hauled out the biggest silver ore strike in the state. The big mines were named after patron saints who answered their prayers: San Lucas, San Ygnacio, San Francisco, and San Felipe.

Fights between the white "gold seekers" and the Mexican miners dominated Cerro Gordo's lawless days. Word has it the famed "Bad Man from Bodie" was run out of Cerro Gordo. Vigilantes and drunken mobs were more the standard in keeping the peace and disciplining offenders on the lawless streets of Cerro Gordo, where it's said a murder a day was common.

Silver ore from Cerro Gordo was first transported in sacks by pack mules and burros to the Silver Sprout Mill, a few miles west of Fort Independence. By 1868, regular shipments of silver bullion were hauled by mule train over a 28 day span into Los Angeles. Silver bars weighing about 85-to-87 pounds, were worth about $335 dollars. Cerro Gordo made its mark in California and became the largest silver producer in the state.

Photo courtesy of Theresa Goldstrand

The "Yellow Grade" road soars upward to the top of an 8000' pass and into the restored mining town of Cerro Gordo. The town was abandoned in 1878 after the mines had played out. It is now an interesting tourist attraction. SUVs and pickups recommended.

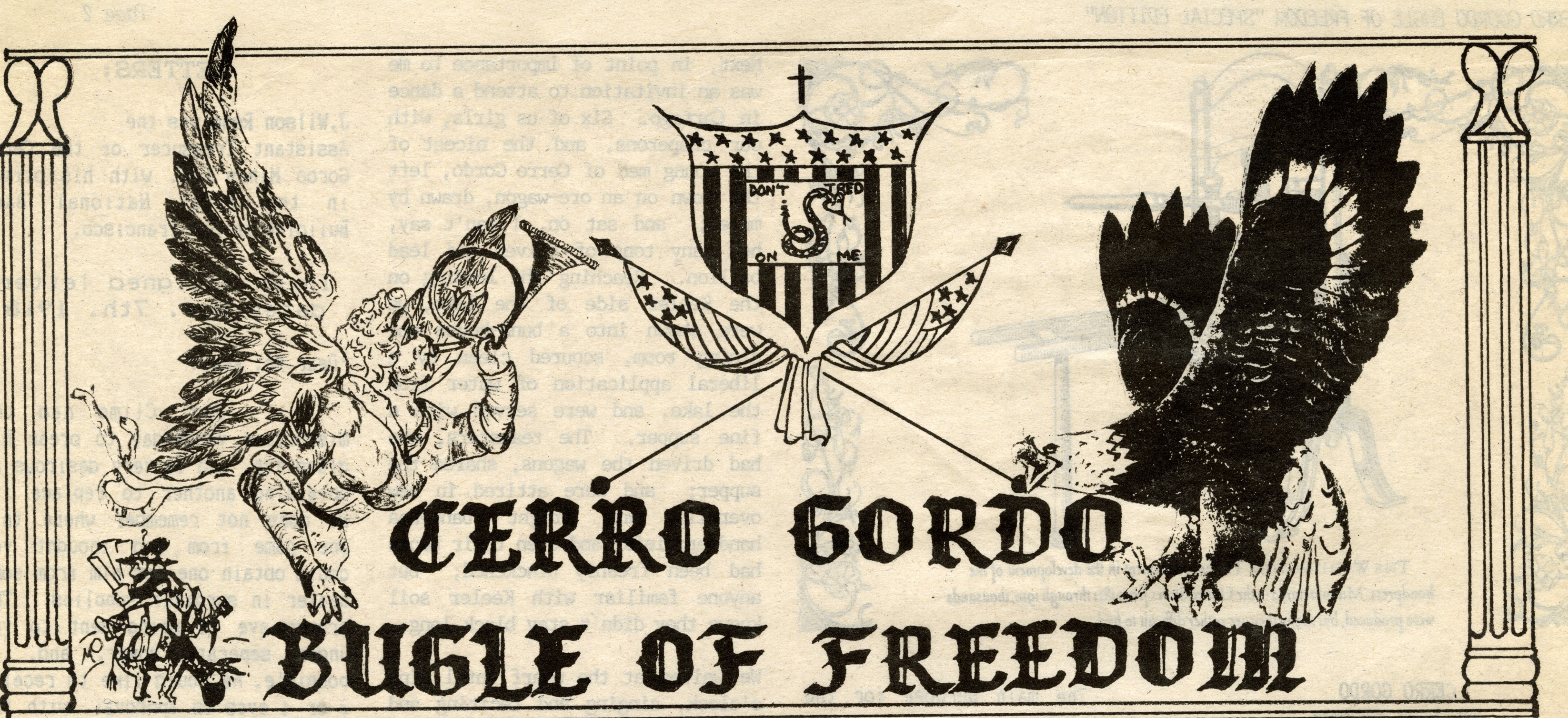
In the spring of 1876, the Wyoming and Hemlock silver mines in Surprise Canyon played out. It foreshadowed the downturn of events for Cerro Gordo. In December 1876, mining giant Mortimer Belshaw shut his furnace down. In August 1877, the new Union building burned along with the mine's hoisting works. Belshaw quit his Cerro Gordo retreat and returned to his family in Antioch, near San Francisco.

About the time the big mines at Cerro Gordo closed, Mammoth and Bodie attracted most of the camp followers, and the "Fat Hill" boomtown went bust. Cerro Gordo smelters shut down for good in 1878 and the town was abandoned.

Some mystery surrounds the existing old buildings with reputed sightings of the Cerro Gordo ghost. The apparition resembles a former woodcutter, Alphonse Benoit, who was found murdered. Photographs of this distressed spirit are said to be kept in the photo album in the American Hotel lobby at Cerro Gordo.

The lives and memories of those who came are frozen in pictures and written on pages in history, understood by those few who stayed and those who keep watch still.

Through the efforts of former owner, Jody Stewart and her husband, Michael Patterson, several buildings have been restored. Several others are works in progress.



CERRO GORDO BUGLE OF FREEDOM

AN ACCOUNT OF THE UNDERGROUND BROUGHT TO LIGHT OR A STORY ADORNED IN SILVER

In the beginning, there was no Hollywood. No electric lights illuminated the night skies for more than a hundred miles around. There were no tumbleweeds and most of the inhabitants of the Antelope Valley were antelope. Red Rock State Park was just another deep sand obstacle dragging at the wheels of progress.

Are you a hopeless romantic? Do you believe you were born a century too late? Well, take heart, there's a unique opportunity for some of you to enjoy a historic journey back in time, a chance to stay in an authentic old 1867 "ghost town". A hundred and twenty nine years ago, traveling the 200 miles north of Los Angeles to Cerro Gordo (Fat Hill), entailed a perilous 28 day round trip. Even after the launching of the bullion steamer BESSIE BRADY on the Owens Lake, the trip took 24 days. Now you can reach the old silver camp via state highways and county roads. In a few short and scenic hours, you can enjoy a quiet reflective weekend in the tiny ghost town nestled at 8500 feet in the Inyo Mountains of Eastern California.

The privately owned townsite, a diamond in the rough, is located near the border of the newly expanded Death Valley National park and wilderness area. The county

continued on page 7

CERRO GORDO MINES PRESENTS!

The famous old **CERRO GORDO GHOST TOWNSITE** is now available BY RESERVATION!

You and your group can now enjoy the 1868 Townsite; including the 1871 American Hotel, the fully restored 1904 Bunkhouse (accomodates up to 14), the 1868 Belshaw House (accomodates up to 5). You and your group will enjoy colorful history and artifacts in Beaudry's General Store (now a museum complete with viewing deck), an assay office, the 1877 Hoist Works, and numerous other structures.

The TOWNSITE is perfect for **PHOTOGRAPHY CLUBS AND WORKSHOPS!** Unlike Bodie, Cerro Gordo is privately owned and you set your own shooting schedule, according to the light and not the clock! The photo opportunities are too numerous to mention. The views are truly spectacular. You can see majestic Mt. Whitney, the Sierras reflected on the Owen's Lake playa, vibrant sunsets and beautiful pink and gold sunrises.

The TOWNSITE, closed to collectors for nearly 2 decades, is also the perfect locale for **ROCK AND MINERAL COLLECTORS**. The site features several hundred thousand tons of dump materials from the main mine workings. (Those old workings consisted of seven levels—approximately 37 miles of tunnels.)

CERRO GORDO is world reknown for:

Anglesite, anhydrite, argentite, atacamite, aurichalcite, azurite, barite, bindheimite, bouronite, calcite, caledonite, cerargyrite, cerrussite, ceruantite, chrysocolla, dufrenoysite, fluorite, galena, geothite, greenockite, hemimorphite, hallosite, hydrozincite, jamesonite, leadhillite, limonite, linerite, liroconite, malachite, mimetite, plumbogumite, pyrite, quartz, silver, smithsonite, sphalerite, stibnite, stromeyerite, tetrahedrite, tetradymite, willemite and wulfenite.

We are hiring the most well known professionals for a planned lecture series on specimen collecting, photography, and other related topics.

Seminars will include catered meals and ample opportunities for you and your group to collect from the old dumps, and photograph to your heart's content!

You can be comfortably accomodated on site. However, if you require a little less "ambiance" and more conventional creature comforts, the picturesque little town of Lone Pine, nestled at the foot of the Sierras, is only 20 miles away.

For further information, rates, and a customized itinerary, please call:

619-876-4154

ANTIQUES...

THE STORY OF CERRO GORDO

By Mrs. J. S. Gorman

And now comes a date, August 25, 1875. A date to be recalled in Cerro Gordo as the wedding of the first white girl; and a date to be remembered by me as one of the most important in my life—for I was that girl.

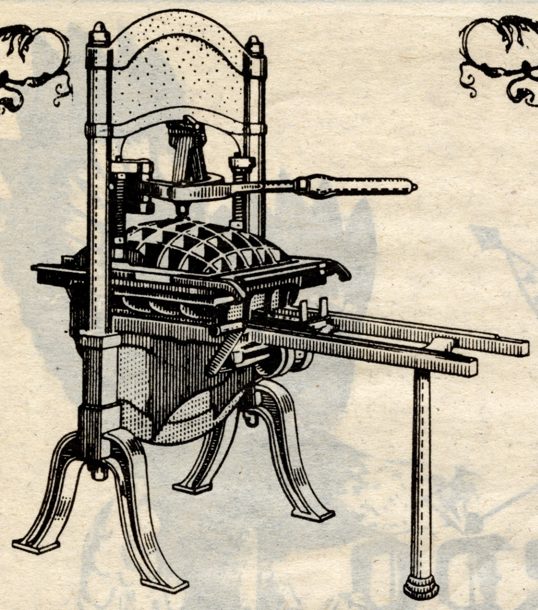
For days my friends had searched the hillsides and had decorated the hotel with native flowers and mountain shrubbery until it was a bower. I can see myself standing before the green background, so small, so young, so frightened, in my white dotted Swiss dress, my big blue ribbon sash, while soft music played in the distance and I promised to love, honor and obey.

After the ceremony, we danced until daybreak to the beautiful music of the two musicians I described before. Then we started down the hillside. The stagecoach was bright and resplendent with paint and white ribbon bows, the bridal party were gay in their new dresses and suits, the six horses were spirited, and away we tore. Halfway down the grade, the harness parted, whether as a result of an accident or a prank, we never knew; but we were left sitting in grandeur in a stalled coach, while the horses galloped back up the grade.

Brewery Wagon

A brewery wagon, belonging to the Louie Munsinger Brewery came along with a load of empty beer kegs. We

continued on page 4



THE WASHINGTON. The final statement in the development of the handpress. Manufactured in the United States from 1821 through 1910, thousands were produced, but today they are rather difficult to find.

CERRO GORDO
BUGLE OF FREEDOM

Established 1872
• 2 editions

Re-established 1994
• 2 editions

Re-established 1996
• SPECIAL EDITION

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Correspondent.......Chas. A. Walla

CERRO GORDO GHOST TOWN
March. 1996

This, **SPECIAL EDITION** is the third go-round for the **BUGLE OF FREEDOM**, the second in as many years,

We will be developing our policies as we darn well see fit, and hope that our style appeals to our readers.

There will be articles and stories of interest from the early days as well as more current events. We will undoubtably editorialize. There may be letters to the editor in future issues

The main purpose for the ressurection of this paper is to generate and provide financial support for the Private Restorative Reuse Projects at Cerro Gordo and Swansea. To that end we may offer advertizing space in future issues. We may also insert a Classified section. The above mentioned is entirely subject to our reader response.
EDITOR

ANOTHER STORY OF CERRO GORDO
By Mrs. J.S. Gorman

A bon-fire was kindled in front of the American Hotel and when it was flaming brightly, the prominent men of the town started to make speeches, encouraged by the noise and cheers of the miners. At the height of the merry-making, all solemnly threw their hats into the blaze and trooped across to the Beaudrey store to be outfitted with new ones. A few minutes later, they swaggered back, a very funny sight! Some wore the most elaborate of silk, "stove-pipe" hats; some, huge Stetsons that fell over their eyes, some had children's hats, gay with wide ribbons, held atop their heads by elastics; and some, the last to get to the store, had to content themselves with flaring sunbonnets.

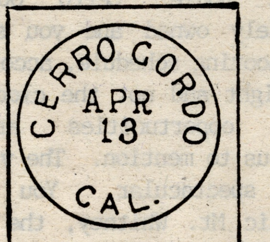
In their motley head gear, they danced around and around the fire, drinking to the health of the town and to the Belshaws. That night there was a big dance and supper given free to the town by the mine owners and all made merry until daybreak. And in justice to the citizens of that day, I wish to state that I did not see a drunken man, either on the street or at the dance.

Next, in point of importance to me was an invitation to attend a dance in Cartago. Six of us girls, with our chaperons, and the nicest of the young men of Cerro Gordo, left the town on an ore-wagon, drawn by mules; and sat on, I can't say, how many tons of silver and lead bullion. Reaching the landing on the Keeler side of the lake, we were shown into a bunk-house and dining room, scoured clean by a liberal application of water from the lake, and were served with a fine supper. The teamsters, who had driven the wagons, shared the supper; and were attired in new overalls and bright bandanna handkerchiefs, and even their boots had been freshly blackened; but anyone familiar with Keeler soil knows they didn't stay black long.

We waited at the wharf until nine o'clock, singing and reciting and listening to music played by a violinist from Lone Pine and one of the best guitar players I have ever heard, who had drifted in from the outside world. Finally we gave up all thoughts of the dance at Cartago as something had happened to the Bessie Brady, the boat, which prevented it from crossing.

Back to the scoured dining room we went and had our dance there. Today I look back on that night as one of the happiest times of my life. Good music, good company and moonlight on silver water. What mattered rough floors as we dannced merrily over them? But what our mothers said the next day when they saw our best shoes scuffed to bits is quite another story.

J.S. GORMAN MICRO-BIOGRAPHY
ON PAGE 3



INY-270
CERRO GORDO
POST OFFICE

The C.G. Post Office was originally established on January 14, 1869 and discontinued on January 12, 1887. It was re-established on September 14, 1889 and discontinued on March 15, 1895.

The first postmaster was one James J. Hefferman.

LETTERS:

J.Wilson Reno was the Assistant Treasurer of the Cerro Gordo Mines Co.. with his office in the First National Bank Building in San Francisco.

In an unsigned letter dated Nov. 7th. 1918

"Dear Mr. Reno:

Dad" Climo had the misfortune yesterday to break his glass eye. and is very desirous of obtaining another to replace it. He does not remember where this one came from and thought you could obtain one for him from some dealer in surgical supplies. The broken eye is being sent to you under seperate cover. and. if possible. he would like to receive 3 or 4 eyes on approval. with the privilege of keeping the one which best matched his good eye. He will greatly appreciate anything you can do for him along this line. ....Yours very truly."

HEALTHY AS AN OX

1996. For the past ten years we have bragged about never being sick on the hill, postulating that the dry air and altitude must be too tough on mere virus and bacteria...until this winter that is... . One of our friends perscribed **Rock and Rye**. Well, it does help you sleep.

At times we wondered if we weren't being revisited by something left over from 1918 as recorded in the following excerpted correspondences:

October 15th. 1918

"Dear Mr. Reno:

We had the first snow of the season last night, over six inches falling. The Spanish Influensa has made its appearance in Keeler, Owenyo, Manzanar and Independence,

continued on page 3

November 11th. 1918

continued from page 2

MORE ABOUT MRS. J.S. GORMAN

Born in 1860, to Maroret Lewis, Lu Lu was married in the American Hotel at the ripe old age of 15. Her mother ran the Hotel. Lu Lu married Lt. Al Wapplenorst who was stationed in the calvary at Ft. Independence. It is believed the Lieutenant was killed in a Darwin fracas within 14 months of his wedding.

Lu Lu remarried Mr. J.S. Gorman and they had a son named Valerie. Valerie married Mary Watterson, and was her second husband. They all lived in the "Honey House", a bee-keepers house north of Independence. Mary Watterson-Gorman, the daughter-in-law of Lu Lu Lewis, passed away in a Bishop Retirement Home in 1990 at the wonderful age of One Hundred and One!

An ambrosial account of Lu Lu's wedding can be read in **THE BOYS IN THE SKY BLUE PANTS** by **Dorthy Cragen.**

FLOURING MILLS.

CAK CREEK FLOURING MILLS,

A. N. BELL, Prop'r.

HAVING ALMOST ENTIRELY REFITTED my Mills, I am now turning out Flour that is

EQUAL TO THE BEST.

[illegible]

A. N. BELL.

"MINE CARETAKER FINDS FRIEND DEAD ON LONELY ROAD ...and buries him"

B.o.F. Roving Reporter **Don Becker**, still of Independence, digs up this header from the July 30, 1943 **INYO REGISTER** newspaper morgue. After nearly 53 years, all the details still have not been un-earthed, however, it does appear that one man was the caretaker at the Cerro Gordo mine, and the other a caretaker at the Estelle Mine.

And also from the **INYO REGISTER** May, 1914: Last Sunday a miner was accidently killed at Cerro Gordo. It is supposed by being precipitated from a bucket in its upward journey. The man, Virgil Kluumnzer, an Austrian, had evidentally jumped into the bucket, which is contrary to rules, and it hit the sides of the shaft, throwing him out. The body, quite dead, was found at the 900 foot level.

CURES
RHEUMATISM,
NEURALGIA,
SCIATICA,
And all Nervous Pains.

OPIUM HABIT AND DRUNKENNESS Cured in 10 to 20 Days. No Pay till Cured. DR. J.L. STEPHENS, LEBANON, OHIO.

BREWERIES.

Germania Brewery,
LONE PINE, CAL.,
John Lubken, Prop'r.

THE UNDERSIGNED WOULD RESPECTFULLY call attention to the superior facilities in the above well known establishment for the manufacture of the finest quality of Beer which is furnished to customers in all parts of the county at the lowest possible rates.

The Pioneer Brewery,
INDEPENDENCE, CAL.,
JOS. FERNBACH, Prop'r.

The Little Brown Jug
Old E. L. ANDERSON
Rye OR Bourbon
QUALITY UNSURPASSED.
Delivered in sealed case (no marks) at your home, *Direct from the Distillery*. Save all middlemen's profits and adulterations. Buy of us at $2.90 per gallon. Write us for prices and full information. All business strictly confidential. Address
THE E. L. ANDERSON DISTILLING CO.,
Box No. 1600. Newport, Kentucky.

Letters continued

but so far Cerro Gordo is in the clear.
Yours very truly."

October 22. 1918

"Dear Mr. Rose:

Everybody in San Francisco will be compelled to wear a mask from tomorrow on. The situation is very serious here. a large number of deaths having resulted from the epidemic so far and it has not yet reached its height. I have had a cold in my head for a week or ten days, but its about gone now. In case the epidemic reaches Cerro gordo you all better don the mask at once, as they claim it is the only preventative.

Yours very truly,
J. Wilson Reno"

October 25th. 1918

"Dear Mr. Reno:

P.S. The Spanish Influenza is getting pretty good hold in this neighborhood. There are 22 cases at the Natural Soda Products Co., and every one in Owenyo with 4 exceptions either has had it or has it now."

October 29th. 1918

"Dear Mr. Reno:

The influenza has reached Cerro Gordo and we have taken two men to Keeler and have two more sick today. It is very bad in Keeler, Bishop, Cartago and other valley towns. Joe Cook has had it for several days and is pretty sick. Buck is in bed today. 12 Spaniards, mostly former employees of Cerro Gordo, now have this disease and are quarantined in the Bean house here. However, there very few deaths resulting from the epidemic here. H.O. Wangelin, the Southern Sierras Power Co. superintendent died as a result of flood-pnuemonia a few days ago.

Yours very truly,"

"Dear Mr. Reno:

Several of our flood victims are now able to walk about but all appear to be in a very weakened condition. There have been a large number of deaths in Keeler and other valley towns. However, think conditions will become normal again in a short time.

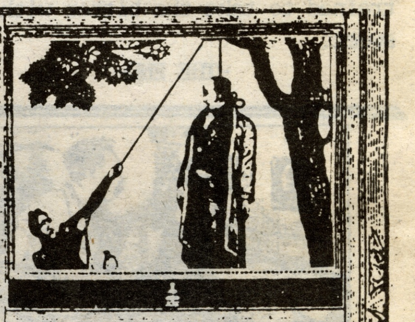
Yours very truly,"

THIS WE WISH WOULD CHANGE

In a letter to a Mr. Climo. who was the Superintendant of Cerro Gordo Mines Co.. dated **Dec. 27th. 1916.** to wit:

Botsford gave his wife a beating yesterday. The little girl came running out of the house crying and told Hanson. who was thawing out the water box. that Botsford was beating her mother. Hanson called Ed Wilson and he went into the house. Mrs. Botsford said that Ralph had been beating her but did not care so much for herself but that he had been beating up the little girl also. She also said that he had threatened to shoot her with a revolver. Ed was going to dismember him but she protested. There was some talk of giving a necktie party and using a telephone pole for a while but nothing of the sort was resorted to. Think it would be best policy to get rid of the outfit as soon as possible. ...Sincerely yours."

BoF note: Hangin' someone from a phone pole would have been a new and historic event on the hill. seein' as we believe it was 1916 when Cerro Gordo was first electrified and its first power poles were installed.



GORMAN continued

scrambled into the wagon. The Judge of Inyo county settled himself on a keg, the bridesmaids followed suit, some notables from Cerro Gordo made themselves comfortable on other kegs, and the bride and groom followed their examples. And swaying and jolting, giggling and slipping, we were away once more.

At Swansea there was a tasty lunch waiting for us; at Lone Pine there was a big reception awaiting us, the solemnity of which was rather destroyed by the loud guffaws which greeted our entrance on a beer wagon. At Lone Pine we secured another coach, and with spirits made the gayer by what had happened, away we went to Independence where we had time only to refresh ourselves before attending the biggest wedding ball and supper that was ever given in that community.

All Were There

There were officers and soldiers, for I was a soldier's daughter; there were farmers and their wives; there were merchants and lawyers; there was the most delicious of suppers; there were two hundred and fifty guests to drink to the health of the bride in sparkling champagne; and there was the very young bride, who felt as though she were floating on air, so happy and excited was she.

Now it is time for a "fade-out." But there is one thought that I would leave with you. The people of that day enjoyed life to the utmost, but when the end came and the plumes of smoke poured no longer from the smelters, they packed up their household goods and left to seek new homes without lamenting—for they were pioneers trained to take the bitter with the sweet.

-THE END-

MINER'S DREAM.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Announcing:

The most cardinal and historical Phoenix event

to proceed

the advancing millenium!

The reimergence

of the

most prestigious and pre-eminent

Social Society

of the

Eastern Sierra!

For your perusal

we present

THE

CERRO GORDO SOCIAL UNION

a private club.

CERRO GORDO SOCIAL UNION

Est. November 1871

The GHOST AND GHOSTESS OF FAT HILL (CERRO GORDO) cordially invite you to join the **CERRO GORDO SOCIAL UNION**, a PRIVATE CLUB, originally established on a cold November day in 1871.

The CGSU enjoyed a short moment of indulgence in cultural tranquility and cerebral exercise amidst the bloody, brawling, "man for the day", "get the lead out" atmosphere defining life in the old roaring mining camp. Remember, the BAD MAN FROM BODIE was run out of CERRO GORDO!

After a brief interlude, the cultural endeavors fell prey to the "Lorelei" seductress. Merry and boistrous dance hall music tempted them away from the Social Union and back to street fighting in front of the saloons.

Now, in 1996, the saloon's patrons and fancy ladies, the miners, teamsters, and dreamers have all gone on to their rewards. CERRO GORDO, old and tired, (but spirited) proudly stands sentry over the Owens' Valley, SALUTING Mt. Whitney and the Golden Trout Wilderness to the west and the newly created Death Valley National Park, a neighbor to the east.

Typically, the historic cycle of old mining sites like CERRO GORDO is one of boom, bust, boom. Since 1985 a small group of volunteers has pushed CERRO GORDO into a new boom period: rehabilitating, exhuming, salvaging, protecting and nurturing the precious remains. Returning guests over the years have noticed the loving attention the site has received. Today, we must be able to focus attention on approximately 20 other historic structures within the 106 acre townsite. It is our desire to continue to preserve and share CERRO GORDO'S historic charm and integrity. **IT'S A MONUMENTAL TASK, BUT WITH YOUR PARTICIPATION, IT CAN BE ACHIEVED!**

Therefore, we invite you to join the CERRO GORDO SOCIAL UNION, a PRIVATE CLUB, organized with the objective of enhancing and accelerating the historic townsite "restorative re-use" project.

In addition to all the BEAUTIFUL AND NATURAL amenities available to guests at CERRO GORDO, we have scheduled a calendar of SPECIAL EVENTS for 1996 including:

PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS, MINERAL SYMPOSIUMS, HORSEBACK RIDES, HISTORIC SITE TOURS, LAPIDARY WORKSHOPS, WESTERN DANCE INSTRUCTION, HOLIDAY ACTIVITES, COWBOY COMPETITIVE SHOOTS-OUTS, NATURAL HISTORY AND SCIENCE CLINICS, CHILI COOK-OFFS, MYSTERY WEEKENDS, ARCHERY CLINICS AND OTHER EVENTS TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION!

For an ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEE you can be a vital participant in this important and romantic effort. We are offering a tiered membership on three levels as follows: ZINC ($250.), SILVER ($500.), AND GOLD ($1,000.).

RESTORE HER GLORY!

CERRO GORDO built L.A., HER ghosts will die if we delay! MOTHER NATURE'S wrath so savage, FATHER TIME? His namesake's "Ravage!" YOU can help restore her glory, enhance the ending to her story.

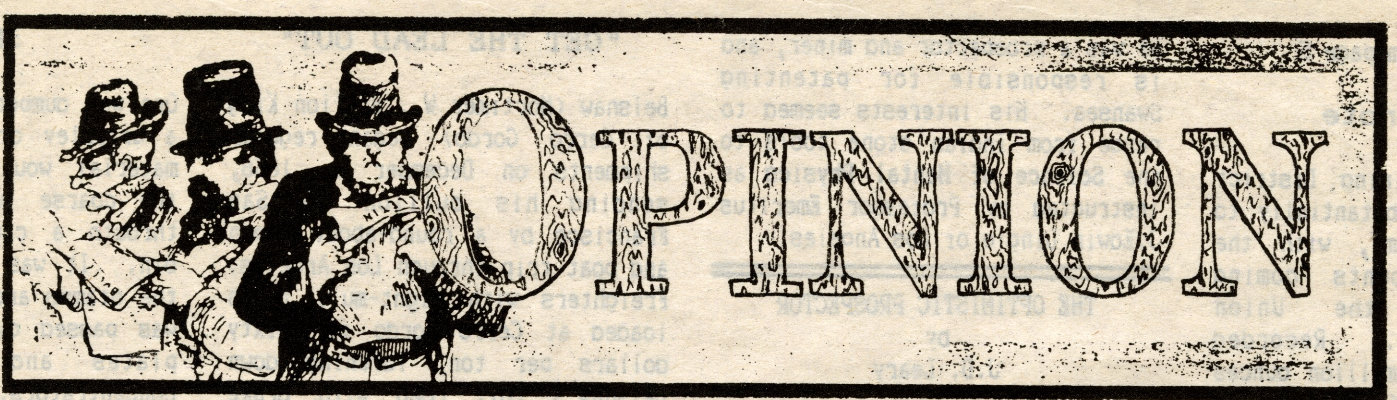
Join our club and you'll receive, benefits you won't believe: The ***BUGLE OF FREEDOM,*** *Ghost Gazette, ADVENTURES you won't soon forget! A BOOK entitled* ***"From This Mountain"*** *A pause to drink from history's fountain. A* ***TEE SHIRT.*** *too, you'll wear so proudly, a quiet place to listen loudly!*

For each of YOU, we'll ***plant a tree,*** *a gift throughout eternity. Ghost Town day use, trails to hike, bring your camera, horse and bike! Campsites, Paddocks, BBQ's, Picnic! Sit! Enjoy grand views!*

Rockhounds, Shutterbugs, Riders too, you'll find all sorts of things to do! Fourth of July Celebrations spotlight each years' restoration. Some will love the holiday snow, when snow mobile's the way to go. A chance to dance and sing with glee or bundle up, cross country ski!

Reunions, weddings we can host. We'll share true photos of our ghost. So, join us, be our special guest, ***HELP SUPPORT A NOBLE QUEST!***

"THE CERRO GORDO SOCIAL UNION" ORIGINALLY ESTABLISHED NOVEMBER, 1871.



HISTORICAL CONTINUUM

Visitors to Cerro Gordo recognize very quickly that aside from the charm of the mission style architecture of the American Hotel, the townsites remarkable charm comes from its spectacular setting rather than Victorian elegance. They also recognize that first and foremost, Cerro Gordo's fame is that of a prosperous mining camp.

A host at the old camp can count on having to answer the following questions for each new group of visitors: 1) Will the mine ever re-open? and 2) You won't let them mine around here will you? Our answer to the first question is: The district has been under exploration for roughly ten years now"...and to the second. "Yes we hope the area is mined again, just not inside the townsite." In fact the vast majority of restoration work we have accomplished in the last decade has been due to the presence of exploration geologists working for major mining companies.

While discussing the mining business with our guests, we often ask them to take the pro-active approach and call us collect if they can find anything at home or work that someone didn't either mine or grow. Ten years. 35.000 visitors. no calls!

Perhaps one of the best discussions we have encountered is found in the **Viewpoint** section of the December, 1991 **HISTORIC PRESERVATION NEWS**.-- The newspaper of **THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION** in an article by Linda J. Barth. Since it seems that sometimes it is easier to ask forgiveness than permission, we are reprinting that article here without permission. and beg forgiveness for doing so.

DOES PRESERVATION HAULT HISTORY?

What omniscience do we as preservationists or historians decide that the evolution or lifespan of a landmark, whether building or site, is finished?

Recent (1991) news about the modern gold-mining threat to Bodie, Calif., a ghost town preserved in a state of arrested deterioration, brought to mind an interesting dilemma. Bodie is commemorated as a National Historic Landmark because it represents the "boom-and -bust cycle of mining in the frontier west" (to quote from the July/August issue of **Historic Preservation News.**) Renewed interest in mining the hills of Bodie today is fueled by the same sorts of developments as it was a century ago: Improved mining technology and new geological information. Why not consider that the new mining venture may be just another boom-and -bust episode in the cycle of western mining history: What if the State of California had declared in 1882, during one of the first economic downturns in Bodie's history, that henceforth further development was prohibited and that the townsite would be preserved in its then-present condition? It would not be the historic landmark, representing several cycles of mining activity, that we know today. If we refuse to permit this new episode of mining activity, are we missing an opportunity to relive history, and thus add to Bodie's significance as a historic resource" Maybe an important economic and historic lesson can be learned from seeing that the cycles that motivated settlement of the West are still a component of our development.

The challenge of determining when the active life of an artifact is finished, and therefore preservation without further change should begin, is an issue regularly faced in the railroad preservation field. Very often a locomotive or railroad car has been saved for decades by volunteers primarily so that someday it might be restored to operation. These rescuers feel that, since locomotives were built to run on railroads. refusing to operate a given artifact would conflict with the machine's original purpose. And certainly one cannot fully explain the beauty and raw power of a steam locomotive by pointing to only the silent. lifeless black behemoths. In railroad preservation, a debate has, or will eventually, take place over nearly every extant piece of equipment: Should the artifact be kept pristine, or be restored to an earlier configuration, or should it be altered for safe demonstration because it can thereby best illustrate the history of railroading" Some pieces will be preserved as documents of the past, other pieces will continue their careers. working to bring the past to life.

Whether the subject of preservation effort be railroad car, elderly building, or ghost town, we must ask ourselves: Are we saving history, or stopping it? If we do not intervene, will the artifact or building be squandered, or might it embark upon a legitimate new incarnation? Have we considered its possible future use just as carefully as we have examined its provenance? Take for example a long-used factory building abandoned when a modern plant is completed. We may wish rightly to declare the factory and its appurtenances a landmark and prevent the owner from demolishing them--but then a proposal surfaces to replace the outmoded equipment with that of yet another manufacturing process, reusing the building and site again as a factory. Rather than flatly deny the proposal, shouldn't we at least consider that another reincarnation of the building as a manufacturing site could add to its preservation value?

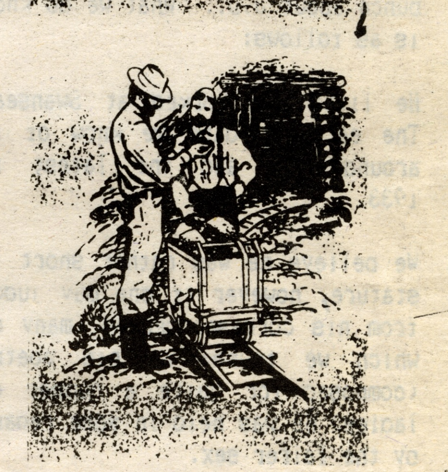
Blindly arresting the continuing evolution of places and things may be just as villainous as failing to preserve anything. We can't sacrifice every historic building and site to progress, but as responsible caretakers, should we not give fair consideration to the possibility that the artifacts in our custody are not always ready to be embalmed?

Linda J. Barth is a management analyst with the City of Los Angeles's Travel Town. which is an interpretive railroad museum located in Griffith Park.

MINERALS USE

Each year. according to the U.S. Bureau of Mines. every American requires 40,000 pounds of new minerals. At that level of consumption, the average newborn infant will need a lifetime supply of 795 pounds of lead. mainly for car batteries, solder and electronic components: 757 pounds of zinc, as an alloy with copper to make brass, as protective coatings on steel and as chemical compounds in rubber and paints: 1.500 pounds of copper, mainly used in electrical motors, generators, communications equipment and wiring: 3,593 pounds of aluminum for all sorts of things-like beverage cans, folding lawn chairs, and aircraft: 32,700 pounds of pig iron, for kitchen utensils, automobiles, ships and large buildings: 26,550 pounds of clays, for making bricks, paper, paint, glass and pottery: 28,213 pounds of salt, for cooking, plastics, highway de-icing and detergents: and 1,238,101 pounds of stone, sand and gravel and cement, for building roads, homes, schools offices and factories.

Reprinted from: GEOTIMES. a publication of the American Geological Institute. May. 1989.



continued from page 5

BoF footnote

The Cerro Gordo Mining District has contributed substantially to our national economy, with the most notable amounts coming primarily from the Union Consolidated Mine. Recorded production was 4.4 million ounces of silver (the chief use today of silver is in photographic films), 16,000 tons of lead, 12,000 tons of zinc, an unknown quantity of copper, limestone (primarily used for the processing of soda-salt products from the Owens Lake), as well as less common minerals. In 1987 it was discovered there was Gallium at Cerro Gordo. Gallium is used as super-conductor material in photovoltaics and fiber-optics. In 1995 substantial percentages of sheelite (a flourescent ore of tungsten) were recognized in the old CG mine dumps by attendees to the first annual Cerro Gordo Mineral Symposium.

INGERSOLL ROCK DRILLS

AND

AIR COMPRESSORS

Mining Machinery.

Berry & Place Machine Company.

WHO IN THE HILLS WAS JOHN D. LEARY

As of the date of this B.O.F. edition we don't know a whole bunch about J.D.. What we do know is as follows:

He lived and worked at Swansea. The earliest date we know of is around 1925 and the latest is 1933.

We believe he was rather short in stature, however if one may judge from his correspondences (many of which we found) or his poetry (composed for quite a number of ladies) he was held in some regard by the fairer sex.

He was a prospector and miner, and is responsible for patenting Swansea. His interests seemed to range from Indian stone tools to the Science of Mental Physics as instructed by Professor Emeritus J.Edwin Dingle of Los Angeles.

THE OPTIMISTIC PROSPECTOR

by

J.D. Leary

When the panic struck Owens Valley
I did not sign or sob,
I did not go bootlegging
or hunting for a job.

I took my little pick with me
And in the hills did climb
Then for a starter on my way
I staked me off some lime.

But as the lime is so uncertain
So before I would be late
I kept right on a hiking
Then I found some good red slate.

This red slate it is beautiful
It has a pretty sheen
But I wanted another color,
I found some that is green.

Still I was not satisfied
With slate of red and green
But I kept right on a hiking
Then I found some Travertine.

I don't like to be a claim hog
Or I would get more dolomite
But anyhow I went and got
Some good pyrophillite.

Whenever I need money
To settle up my bills
I go to my rich banker
Which is Inyo County's hills.

As my claims are now producing
And I am getting old
It is time that I should take a rest
And not worry over gold.

Now cheer up all you pessimists
And do not kick or whine
We soon will have prosperity
With good old beer and wine.

PIONEER

LIVERY & FEED STABLES,

Independence, Cal.

"GET THE LEAD OUT"

Belshaw (Mortimer W., Bullion King of Cerro Gordo) began regular shipments on December 1, 1868, sending his bullion to San Francisco by a round-about wagon and boat trip through Los Angeles. Freighters with eight-mule teams loaded at Cerro Gordo for sixty dollars per ton, lurching down Belshaw's toll road with brake blocks burning, wallowing across the sandy Mojave, doubling trips over rugged San Fernando Pass with half loads, and rolling into San Pedro from three weeks to a month later. Under consignment by the John J. Tomlinson forwarding house, the metal was transferred to the steamer Orizaba which carried fifteen tons per trip and unloaded its cargo three days later at the San Francisco wharves. **Here it was delivered to the smelting works of Thomas H. Selby, one of San Francisco's earliest hardware menchants.** Since 1865 he had operated a shot tower with lead brought from Europe; he now built a refinery to extract the lead from Cerro Gordo's base bullion and delivered the silver content to the local United States mint. What surplus metal his works could not handle he bought and shipped via Cape Horn to the smelters of Swansea, Wales.

Reprinted from CITY MAKERS by Remi Nadeau.

STAMP MILL

Ore was dumped into the mill over a grizzley or screen. The fine material would go through while the coarse lumps had to be put throuth a crusher set over the bin. It was fed mechanically to the stamps and the resulting pulp was passed over the amalgamation plates and thence to the concentrators. As the years went by many additional and more sophisticated methods were used for the recovery of the gold but to the end of gold mining, stamps played a major part in the crushing of the ores.

The actual crushing took place between the shoes which were attached to the stamps above, and the dies which sat on the bottom of the mortar. The hard quartz soon wore these surfaces away as shown by the example ...... A set of these wearing parts could weigh as much as 500 pounds and many a California foundry was kept busy casting them.

SELBY SMELTING AND LEAD CO.,

REFINERS OF GOLD AND SILVER BARS, GOLD DUST, ETC.

Buyers of Gold, Silver, Lead and Copper Ores, Gold Concentrates, Lead Bullion, Cyanide Product, Etc.

ORE AND BULLION ASSAYERS.

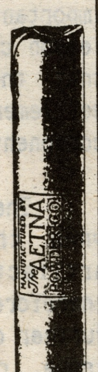
Works at VALLEJO JUNCTION, CAL. Office, 416 MONTGOMERY ST., SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

The best of their kind—

Aetna Dynamite

Lion Fuzes and Blasting Machines

Use them and your blasting troubles will be few



Send for the booklet "Firing Blasts by Electricity"

ALL MADE BY

The Aetna Powder Co.

143 Dearborn St., Chicago

LIVERY STABLES.

PIONEER STABLES,

BISHOP CREEK, CAL.

Joshua Hendy Machine Works

San Francisco, Cal.

Office and Salesroom .... 38 to 44 Fremont Street

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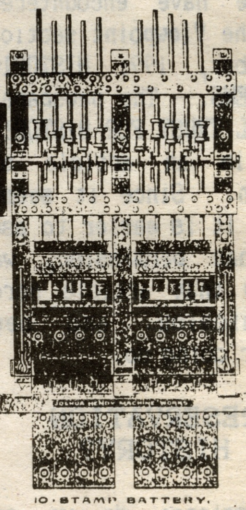


10-STAMP BATTERY.

MINING AND MILLING MACHINERY

Stamp Mills;

"Hercules" Ore Crushers;

"Challenge" Ore Feeders;

"Triumph" Ore Concentrators;

"Hendy-Norbom" Ore Concentrators;

"Triple Discharge" Two Stamp Mills;

Hydraulic Mining Machinery;

Hoisting, Pumping and Irrigating Plants;

Boilers, Engines and Pumps;

Tangential Impact Water Wheels

HARTSHORN'S

Adorned in Silver cont.

maintained access road is narrow and rather steep, but with a reasonably powerful vehicle and advanced planning, those with an adventurous spirit should experience no difficulty. Four wheel drive is recommended, but not required. Tens of thousands have successfully made the journey over the past decade.

f you saw the movies NEVADA SMITH ith Steve McQueen and Carl aulden, WATERHOLE #3 with James oburn and Claude Akin, or NIGHT ASSAGE with Jimmy Stewart and udie Murphy, you've already had limpses of Cerro Gordo. Oscar inning screenwriter Bill Kelley "WITNESS" starring Harrison Ford) s nearing completion of a new estern he hopes to film on site, umored to be entitled FAT HILL or DDIE. You've heard about the "Bad in from Bodie?" Legend has it he is run out of Cerro Gordo!

fore 1870, Los Angeles was known "El Pueblo," a ranching mmunity with a populace proaching 4,500. With the silver nanza raging "on the hill", L.A. gan experiencing a remarkably ofitable period; a welcome spite after years of financial sasters. By 1871 Cerro rdo's own census burgeoned to 300 hardy souls and 1600 mules. e first boom era produced nearly million ounces of silver!

e boom directly affected San dro too. The valuable shipments bullion comprised fully -third of the export trade ough the Port of Los Angeles in 1870's. 300 eighty-three pound s containing silver, gold, per, lead and zinc, were hauled ly by Remi Nadeau's sturdy e-drawn freight wagons down the amous Yellow Grade Road to nsea, on the shoreline of the dry Owen's Lake. (The Ghost of Swansea is among the first and commercial ports west of the sissippi River.) The precious l was shipped via steamer to ago and loaded back on au's wagons for the long haul ugh deeply drifted alkali s to way-stations such as an Wells, Jawbone, Mojave, and ow Springs. Most of these e-stops now have mini-mart gas ions for your convenience.

owing arrival at San Pedro, the o was assigned to the Orizaba, ined for San Francisco's Selby ter. Selby had previously been le to secure a domestic source of lead for his shot tower. He separated the lead and shipped the remainder of the bars to Swansea, Wales for further refinement.

Meanwhile, the great wagons returned slowly to Cerro Gordo loaded with machinery, chickens, hay, barley and other essentials for the remote community of miners, freighters, dance hall girls and shop keepers. The desolate mining camp became, and remains, the bonafide "Comstock" to the city of Los Angeles. It qualifies on an economic premise for the National Registry of Historic Places. The Los Angeles News on February 2, 1872 stated, "To this city Cerro Gordo trade is invaluable. What Los Angeles now is, is mainly due to it. It is the silver cord that binds our present existence. Should it be unfortunately severed, we would inevitably collapse."

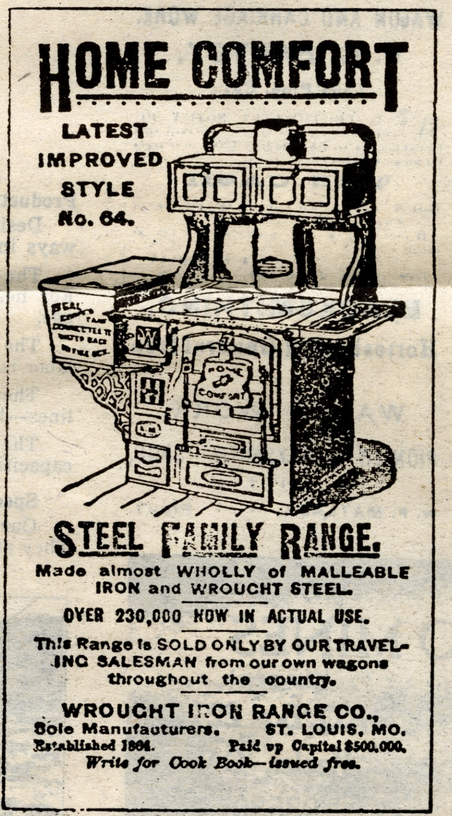
Since 1985, "The Ghost and Ghostess of Fat Hill", Mike Patterson and Jody Stewart, have been working diligently to restore the old townsite. They and a small dedicated cadre of volunteers have lovingly applied a "restorative re-use" philosophy on the old buildings and are now offering package weekends for other folks like themselves who find western history, isolated mine camps, and antiques absolutely irresistable!

The "Ghost", a history major with amazing knowledge of the area and its resources, tirelessly entertains groups with stories and humorous anecdotes. He seems personally acquainted with the colorful characters of the past; he certainly relates to their trials and tribulations after spendng a decade on the mountain. His bright blue eyes twinkle mischievously when he announces, "I came here to leave a legacy! I just didn't intend to pledge an arm and a legacy!"

The "Ghostess", a fourth generation Eastern Californian who has participated in the project since 1973, greets visitors with a mixture of humor and warm hospitality quipping, "Actually, I came here to do a little writing and painting. I got my wish. I write checks and paint walls!" Or, "This is my mid-life crisis. Welcome to my histo-reclamy!" She happily concerns herself with guest's comfort and good health; directing caterers and planning activities based on each group's interests. However, she too can be coaxed into an animated discourse on the "real" ghost—sharing numerous photographs and tales accumulated from scores of eye witnesses.

15 guests can now be accommodated in the restored Bunkhouse and the Belshaw House. The cost is from $65. to $95. per night, per person, including brunch and dinner suitable for any Bullion King. Proceeds are used to continue the monumental project—renovating the townsite. Many guests are motivated to actively participate in the restoration project and enthusiastically return for organized "work week-ends" on such holidays as Memorial weekend and the 4th of July.

The surprisingly comfortable Bunkhouse, built during Cerro Gordo's second "boom" era in 1904, features six fully furnished rooms with an assortment of queen, full, twin and bunk beds, and a dining room. There is a sitting room with sleeper sofa and a Franklin fireplace. Although electrified by a generator, most guests choose to use kerosene lanterns for quiet ambiance.



The 1200 sq. ft. cabin known as the Belshaw House was built in 1868. It was once home to diminutive "Bullion King" Mortimer Belshaw, who later became a State Legislator from Antioch. The cabin is furnished with a queen sized bed in one room and a sleeper sofa in another. It also has a living room with supple leather sofas and a cozy Franklin fireplace, real artifacts on the walls, ecclectic books on the shelves, and even a PrimeStar sattelite dish!

Two additional major undertakings loom on the agenda: the urgently needed restoration of the American Hotel, built in 1871 by an Englishman named John Simpson and the monumental conversion of the 1877 Hoist House into a mining museum. Patterson believes the 2-story, Monterrey styled building may be California's oldest standing hotel east of the Sierras. It certainly is the most often photographed.

A quarterly gazette, the "BUGLE OF FREEDOM", has been resurrected from the 1870's to report jubilantly on progress and plans; and mournfully as in 1993 when heavy snows and fierce winds on "The Mountain" reclaimed the Newtown "Church" and the Morning Star tram trestle. "For every re-birth we orchestrate, there seems to be a corresponding death," laments Jody Stewart. Another phoenix from the past, THE CERRO GORDO SOCIAL UNION, originally established November, 1871, has also arisen from history's ash. The objective is, as always, to creatively and privately fund the overwhelming project as it is patiently guided into yet another millenium.

The vista from high atop the Inyo's crest is truly magnificent. The ghosts of Cerro Gordo stand sentry over the southern Owen's River Valley. Majestic Mt. Whitney, cloaked in white ermine, holds court over all of California. A brilliant kalideoscope adorns the western horizon. Rosey morning hues herald sparkling blue skies. Evenings are lavishly drenched in a golden glow. Stars appear as flawless jewels in the dark night sky.

Here, high on the mountain, you may dare daydream. Wafts of laughter and honky-tonk music merrily escape down lonesome winding roads. Dire warnings issued to would-be claim jumpers echo off rugged canyon walls. Listen! Hear the clank and clamber of chains and skinners' cracking whips, groaning wagons and squeaking wheels; the plodding cadence of endless strings of mules—the absolute lifeline of the town.

To date, the most successful activities have been planned for photographers, mineral collectors, artists, and equestrians. However, there are excellent opportunities for cross country skiers, snow-mobiling, mountain bike riding, 4 X 4 tours and hikers.

If you need to refresh your spirit, and bask in natural plenitude, the Ghost and Ghostess of Fat Hill would like to help you plan an itinerary on "THE MOUNTAIN." Reservations are essential. Call 619-876-4154

TRAM IT ALL ANYWAY
by Chas A. Walla

It was roughly a four hour trip by horse, mule or wagon, up or down the Yellow Grade Road. It was not an easy trip for stages, freight or bullion wagons. Aside from fortification derived mainly from strong drink, teamsters innovatively influenced at least the trip down by putting the mules on the back end and locking the brakes or "putting on the skids." Bullion King Mortimer Belshaw is credited with having invented a metal shoe-skid that attached to the wagons wheel, providing the desired friction against the road bed, and at the same time keeping the wagonwheels iron tire from wearing out.

Just before the turn of the century, the mine operators at Cerro Gordo hitched the freight or ore wagons to a steam-tractor, not unlike Zabriskie's "Dinah" over at the Furnace Creek Ranch. It cut the trip down to about an hour. Its use was discontinued when it was quickly realized that the wagons were just not built sturdily enough for that "speedy" a trip.

By 1906 The Four Metals Mining and Smelting Co. had constructed the five mile long (as the crow flys) Montgomery Tram. From the main mine, its terminus was just short of Keeler at a large company owned silver smelter.

Engineering problems plagued the Montgomery. By 1913, electric transmission lines had been brought from Lone Pine creek, across the north end of the Owens Lake ("drying") to the Saline Valley Salt Tram, just north of Swansea. By 1916 the power lines had been extended to Cerro Gordo via Keeler. That year, on the same alignment as the Montgomery, the newly constructed Leschen Aerial Wire Rope (Electric) Tramway was put in service from Cerro Gordo. Its terminus was over a spur of the Carson and Colorado Narrow Guage R.R., where Cerro Gordo zinc was dumped into open cars and shipped to smelters clear into Kansas.

Roughly around 1958 the tram was "parted out" for salvage. Apparently quite a bit of the hardware was purchased by a mining company who intended to put it back to into service in Candelaria, Nevada. Those plans never came to fruition. Quite a few large tram tower timbers were purchased by a former test piolet who was remodeling his home near Genoa, Nevada. He stacked the timbers "log cabin" style, for "the look" as well as the R-value. This writer believes he could have rivaled Scotty's Castle had he opted for the post and beam style construction.

Aside from the conspicuous tram trestle soaring above the skyline at old Cerro Gordo, the most notable tram remnant is the ore bucket hanging above a rocky canyon along the Yellow Grade. For those readers who want to see, it's easy to find, and sometimes when there's a full moon... .

Late in 1995, while excavating for artifacts near the head of the tram, Cerro Gordo Restoration Volunteers Jim Gramcko and Bob Dues exhumed three 1' x 2' blue on white enameled metal signs. They are all identical and read: **LESCHEN AERIAL WIRE ROPE TRAMWAY, CERRO GORDO, CA..** They were found approximately 14 feet below the surface, stacked one on the other and lying face down. The other artifacts found in that particular hole were of glass, primarily nearly a hundred small corn medicine vials, a couple score cork-top quart sized whiskey bottles and pieces of a broken kerosene lamp. Maybe we could say the person who dumped those signs in the bottom of the outhouse worked the night shift, broke his lamp while walking down the path, couldn't see to doctor his feet and just got drunk to stand the pain..., but that still doesn't explain the signs?

BLACKSMITH.

A NEW PLAN.

BLACKSMITHING

AND

WAGON AND CARRIAGE WORK.

A. C. HARVEY,

Lone Pine, Cal.,

WOULD RESPECTFULLY NOTIFY [illegible] GREAT REDUCTION [illegible]

THE CASH

[illegible]

A. C. HARVEY.

Lone Pine [illegible] July 3 1883

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PIONEER BLACKSMITH SHOP,

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(See Pages 488 and 489 for Data on Leschen Wire Rope)

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Designers and manufacturers of Aerial Tramways in the following systems:

The Leschen Heavy Duty Friction Grip System. For heavy capacities, long distances and general use.

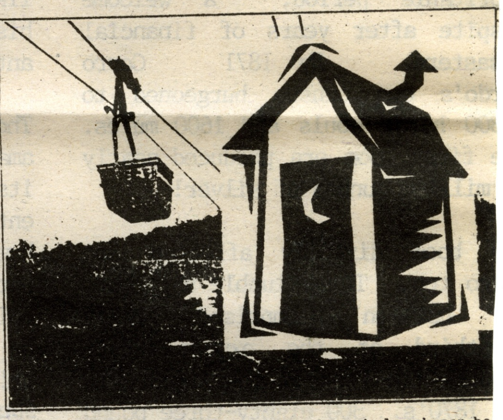
The Leschen Special Automatic System. Where labor is scarce or expensive.

The Leschen Two-Bucket System. For short lines—heavy or light capacities.

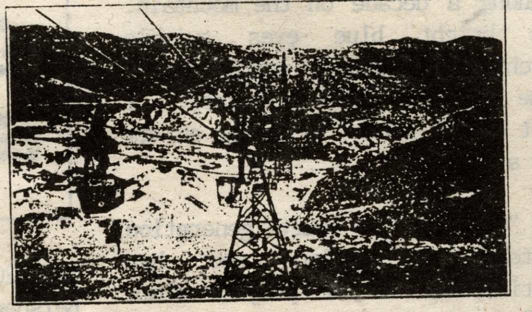
The Leschen Single Carrier System. For small capacities.

Special Designs to Suit Particular Conditions.

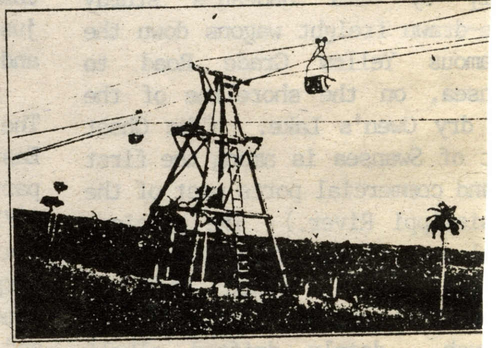
Our Aerial Tramways are built for hard service. They are especially noted for their low upkeep cost.



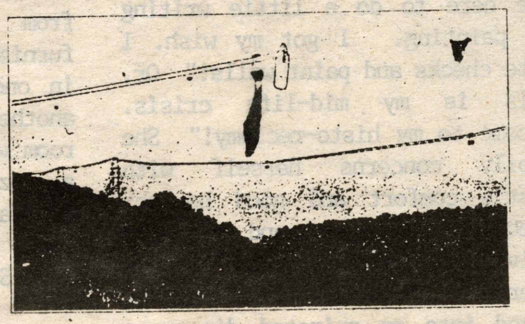
This installation carries 150 tons of crushed rock per ho from quarry to mixing plant on a large concrete job in Ne York State. On this particular project we furnished thr aerial tramways for handling the stone, sand and cement. T contractor has told us that these tramways give him le trouble than any piece of equipment on the job.



This line in Mexico is four miles long and has a capacity of 100 tons per hour of silver ore. Note the extremely rough country, where the cost of any other means of transportation would have been prohibitive.



View along line of a six-mile tramway in Cuba for tr porting copper ore. This installation reduced transporta cost from over $2.00 per ton to 35c per ton. Cost of inst tion returned in a year's saving.



This Leschen Heavy Duty Friction Grip Tramway carries 100 tons of ashes per hour from a power plant of the West Penn Power Company and deposits them in a distant ravine. The line is automatic, except at the loading terminal, and the carriers pass around three angle stations.

If you are contemplating the purchase of aerial tramway, or if you are having transporta troubles, our Engineering Department will gla advise whether a tramway will solve your probl and if so, they will suggest the system best su to your conditions, and will furnish you an appr mate estimate of cost.

See page 500 for your convenience in sendin your requirements.

We have designed and manufactured A Wire Rope Tramways for twenty-five years, th fore our various tramway systems are the pro of practical experience.

SECTION X

KEYSTONE CAT